

THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE AMERICAN LUTHERAN CHURCH AND THE
LUTHERAN CHURCH-MISSOURI SYNOD FROM 1930 to 1941, AND
THEIR FAILURE TO ESTABLISH CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty
of Claremont Graduate School in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
Graduate Faculty of Religion.

Claremont

1973

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INTRODUCTION

On July 16, 1969, the following resolution was passed by the convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod:

Resolved, That the Synod express gratitude to God for creating this unity among us, and we beseech Him to increase our awareness of this great gift; and be it further

Resolved, That with joy and praise to God the Synod herewith formally declare itself to be in altar and pulpit fellowship with the American Lutheran Church; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod reiterate the pledge made in the "Joint Statement and Declaration" to seek a unified evangelical position and practice on the basis of our commitment to the Gospel; that to this end the Synod propose the creation of an intersynodical commission to assist in the proper understanding and practice of fellowship, to supply counsel and aid as a support to the pastoral ministries carried on in the synods, and to suggest appropriate means by which the members of our synods may grow in their understanding and practice of fellowship; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod authorize its President, in consultation with the president of the American Lutheran Church, to announce the establishment of altar and pulpit fellowship between their respective church bodies and to make suggestions for the appropriate implementation of the worthy purposes of this declaration; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod thank the officers, pastors, and congregations of The American Lutheran Church for their many acts of courtesy and kindness toward us and especially for their willingness to meet with us for doctrinal discussions; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Synod commit itself to the following

Conclusion: We, the members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, rejoice over the existing unity of faith and confession, as stated in the doctrinal position of The American Lutheran Church and The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and we embrace the opportunities and assume the obligations of altar and pulpit fellowship.

Recognizing that because of our sinfulness and human frailties there remain imperfections in faith and understanding of the riches of God's grace, as well as failings in life and practice consistent with the Gospel, we pledge ourselves to draw these and all other problems affecting our relationships into the perspective of God's grace as revealed in the divine Word and deal with them within that framework. We pledge ourselves always to have a tender regard for each other's consciences and to stand by each other in mutual sympathy and understanding, forbearance and love.

As members of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, committed to the Holy Gospel, we obligate ourselves to continued study and discussion, always remembering that we, in the love of Christ, must "bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Gal. 6:2)¹

This was a historic occasion in American Lutheranism.

Time magazine called the action "a major break with tradition" for the Missouri Synod.² This was because this church body was the most conservative of the three major American Lutheran churches. It had consistently refused membership in such interchurch organizations as the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, and the National Lutheran Council. It had consistently refused to acknowledge church fellowship with other Lutheran churches unless there was complete agreement in doctrine and practice. To achieve such agreement, it had been engaged in doctrinal discussions with other Lutheran churches for over a century in one form or another. Several times, in 1938 and 1956, it had been close to acknowledging that church fellowship existed with the American

¹ The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Proceedings of the Forty-Eighth Regular Convention (Denver, Colo., 1969), p. 98.

² "A Move Toward Unity," Time, 94, 5 (Aug. 1, 1969), p. 44.

Lutheran Church as it was constituted at that time. But the 1969 resolution was the first official resolution that actually established church fellowship.

The 1969 resolutions on fellowship were different from previous such resolutions. Nowhere did it say that complete agreement had been reached. In fact, it went to some length to emphasize that the Lutheran Confessions in the Augsburg Confession, Article VII define the "necessary and sufficient basis for fellowship" to be that "the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word."³ Then it declared that discussions with the American Lutheran Church had produced the conviction that this kind of agreement existed. In other words, whereas in previous attempts to establish fellowship, complete agreement in doctrine and practice had been the standard, in 1969 this standard was not mentioned. Instead, a kind of doctrinal consensus was acknowledged to be sufficient. This was one of the deficiencies pointed out in the arguments by the Minority Report against fellowship.⁴ Furthermore, in earlier conventions when fellowship with the American Lutheran Church or its antecedent bodies was discussed, its fellowship with other Lutheran churches not in fellowship with the Missouri Synod was regarded as a deterrent to the establishment of church fellowship between it and the Missouri Synod. Yet in

³Missouri Synod, Proceedings (1969), p. 97.

⁴Ibid., p. 99.

1969, there was silence on this subject in the official recommendation made to the convention and in the resolution that was passed. This was another criticism mentioned in many of the recommendations submitted in opposition to fellowship, and this criticism also appeared in the Minority Report.

Therefore, it can be said that the fellowship resolution of 1969 represented a shift in the position taken by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod on church fellowship. One is led to ask what had caused this shift. To answer this, one must take into consideration the previous history of the Missouri Synod and its relations with other Lutheran churches. This dissertation is an attempt to present one part of that history. It will deal with the first official convention resolution on fellowship between the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod in 1938, and its fate. For in 1938, after several years of negotiations, there seemed to be a possibility that eventual fellowship could be established. Yet by 1941 these hopes were dimming. This dissertation will show what led up to the 1938 fellowship resolutions, and why the high hopes would not be realized until 1969.

The dissertation is divided into two parts. Part I deals with the history of the Lutheran churches in America up to 1930. Part II deals with the period from 1930 to 1941, especially whatever had to do with the relations between the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The dissertation shows the similarities and the

differences between these two church bodies, in order to prove this thesis:

It is an oversimplification to explain the failure to achieve church fellowship between the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod through their resolutions of 1938 merely because of doctrinal differences. Although there were these differences, a more basic explanation of their continued separation until 1969 is that there was a different approach to and standards for church fellowship in the two churches. Further study may establish that this was produced by the history, acculturation, and experience with inter-church cooperation of the two churches.

PART I
CHAPTER I

THE EARLY HISTORY OF AMERICAN LUTHERANISM

The history of the fellowship negotiations between the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod in the 1930's began almost two centuries earlier than the period of the present study. The Missouri Synod was formed in 1847, and the three constituent bodies of the original American Lutheran Church were formed in 1818, 1845, and 1854. They were all established because the Lutheran groups existing in America at that time were not meeting the needs of thousands of German Lutheran immigrants settling in the American middle west.

Henry Melchior Muhlenberg and the
Pennsylvania Ministerium

The history of American Lutheranism begins with the organization of the Pennsylvania Ministerium in 1748 under the leadership of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg. Before this, there were isolated groups but no interchurch organization.¹

¹There was one abortive attempt at organizing such a group a few years earlier, in 1735 at Paritan, N. J. under the leadership of Berkenmeyer. Abdel Ross Wentz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America, (Revised Ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), p. 9.

The Swedish Lutherans settled near Wilmington, Delaware, in 1638. The Dutch, German, and Scandinavian Lutherans organized a congregation in New Netherlands in 1649. In 1703 "probably the first regular ordination in the New World" of any kind took place in Philadelphia, when a Swedish prelate ordained the German Pietist Justus Falckner.² German Lutherans from the Palatinate settled in Pennsylvania and the Carolinas in early Eighteenth century and established congregations. In 1734, a group of refugees from Salzburg, Germany, settled in James Oglethorpe's Georgia colony. Around this time congregations were formed here and there and were served sporadically by Lutheran clergymen of varying quality and background. By the time that Muhlenberg arrived in 1742, there were Lutheran congregations scattered from New York to Georgia.

However, official intolerance of the Lutheran faith by the Dutch authorities, and then the gradual adoption of English in place of German, Swedish, or Dutch, made it difficult to maintain a Lutheran identity. Furthermore, the Lutherans traditionally had a "high" view of the church, and were not accustomed to lay leadership. Their churches survived when they were able to get pastors from Europe, but when the mother churches did not supply pastors, the churches declined. These Lutheran congregations by the

²Ibid.

middle of the eighteenth-century needed the stability that an organization of congregations could give.

The time was ripe for a man like Muhlenberg. He was a young pastor from pietistic Halle. Almost as soon as he arrived in America, he was confronted with a situation typical of the Lutheran situation at the time. Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf, of the Moravian Brethren, had come to Pennsylvania and had persuaded many of the German Lutherans to accept his leadership. Evidently they had assumed he was Lutheran, and he did nothing to clarify the situation. That the Lutherans accepted him as their leader indicated the shallow Lutheran consciousness and the lack of doctrinal awareness common at that time. It was this danger of losing congregations for Lutheranism that prompted the authorities at Halle to send young Muhlenberg to salvage the Pennsylvania churches. He immediately began to assert his leadership in and around Philadelphia, and in four weeks was able to get rid of all the non-Lutheran pastors in the Lutheran churches. The three churches in and around Philadelphia designated themselves "The United Congregations" and called him as their pastor.

Muhlenberg then started to take steps to insure stability in the Lutheran Church. He opened schools in each of the congregations. He did more and more work among the other Lutheran groups that asked for his help. He was successful in getting several more pastors from Halle to serve other troubled congregations. Finally, in 1748, a

"Common Service" was adopted by Muhlenberg and other pastors in the area, and this became the basis of the Lutheran liturgies in America to this day. Also in that same year, the first Lutheran synod was organized with six pastors and ten congregations represented. Known at first as "United Pastors" and "United Congregations," it was eventually named "The Pennsylvania Ministerium." It became strong enough to survive an interruption of synodical meetings from 1755 to 1759 because of the large influx of German immigrants, and the temporary breaking of contact with the Halle authorities during the Revolutionary War. In fact it included eighty-one congregations in 1771, and its 1781 constitution and its hymn book of 1786 show that it was now strong enough to be independent from Europe.

But this is not to say that it was a confessionally strict Lutheran body. The early Lutheran settlers had little time for religious controversy. The largest source of German immigrants in the seventeenth century was the German Palatinate, where Lutheran leaders made the earliest efforts to adapt the Lutheran reformation to Calvinistic teachings. The Palatinate was also the home of Philip Melancthon, whose followers were influential in the action of Elector Frederick III in 1563 to establish the Heidelberg Catechism as the official State Confession. The German Protestants from this area were certainly not inclined to Lutheran orthodoxy. In fact,

they seemed to have been indifferent to the kind of minister who served them.

The shortage of pastors certainly hindered the development of a Lutheran consciousness. Some of the Swedish Lutheran congregations went for over fifty years at a time without Swedish clergymen. It is little wonder that many of them joined other churches. After the American Revolution, the Swedes along the Delaware transferred whole congregations to the newly-organized Protestant Episcopal church. Furthermore, the whole mood of colonial life influenced the Lutherans. Pietism, both as it was represented by pastors from Germany, and as it appeared in the Great Awakening, tended to de-emphasize doctrine and emphasize emotions. The drive toward independence affected the religious life of the colonies, and contributed to an Americanized version of all of the Protestant churches, including the Lutheran. For instance, the congregational form of church government flourished in America much more than in Europe.

Therefore when Muhlenberg came to America, he found churches that were Lutheran in name only. His task was not only to consolidate and strengthen the scattered congregations, but also to create a more truly Lutheran church. To be sure, there were pastors who previously had been aware of the problem. William Berkenmeyer was the leader of the New York Lutherans when Muhlenberg was active in Pennsylvania. He and his assistants Michael Knoll and

John August Wolf had come from Northern Germany where Lutheran Orthodoxy was strong. Berkenmeyer warned against the doctrinal laxity of the Pietism from Halle, and corresponded with Muhlenberg about this subject.³

It is true that Muhlenberg was a Pietist himself, but he was also a staunch Lutheran. "His policies and actions presupposed the Lutheran Confessions, and he engrafted churchliness into the life of the congregations."⁴ This is shown by his introduction of a thoroughly Lutheran liturgy, "with only a few features that showed the Pietistic taste of its authors,"⁵ his mention of the Lutheran Symbolical books in the 1781 constitution of the Ministerium of North America (Pennsylvania Ministerium),⁶ and his desire, never realized in his lifetime, to establish a theological seminary in America to train Lutheran pastors. But his influence did not last long after his death in 1787. Already the new liturgy printed in 1786 shifted away from Lutheran orthodoxy, and the new constitution of the Pennsylvania Ministerium of

³Ibid., pp. 9, 10, 26; Conrad Bergendoff, The Church of the Lutheran Reformation (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), p. 190.

⁴E. Theodore Bachmann, "Churches of North America," in Lutheran Churches of the World, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1957), p. 140.

⁵Wentz, History of Lutheranism, p. 58.

⁶Richard C. Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity in America, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 28f.

1792 omitted all mention of the Lutheran Confessions. One reason for these changes was that Rationalism was spreading in Germany and influencing even Halle. But there were other factors. Fischer mentions five tendencies that influenced American Lutheranism in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:

1. Latitudinarianism in doctrine and in church relations;
2. Emotionalism, shaped by the emphasis on "experience" in Puritanism and pietism, which produced American revivalism, a somewhat liberal evangelicalism in belief and a Puritan ideal in ethics;
3. The exuberance of a young nation born of political independence and economic aggressiveness on a laissez faire pattern, and exuberance which in turn bred a popular sense of a God-favored destiny;
4. The disappearance of State-support and State-favoritism in religion, the experiment of the separation of church and State, and the emergence of the "denominational" system of churches, with the result that church membership, support and extension became purely matters of "voluntary commitment";
5. The pressure for common endeavor among Christians in the task of winning the vast, rootless, mobile, 90 percent unchurched populace.⁷

The General Synod

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were Lutheran congregations from Canada to Georgia, from the east coast to Ohio, Tennessee and Kentucky. A number of

⁷Robert H. Fischer, "The Confessionalism of American Lutheran Church Bodies of German Background," in The Church and the Confessions, ed. by Vilmos Vajta and Hans Weissgerber (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), p. 74.

geographic synods were being formed: The New York Ministerium in 1786, the Synod of North Carolina in 1803, the Synod of Ohio in 1818, and the Tennessee and the Maryland and Virginia Synods in 1820. The mood of the times was toward union churches, both in Europe and in the United States. The Proclamation of the Prussian Union in 1817 and the Plan of Union between the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists in 1801 were typical. There were also instances of Lutheran and Reformed congregations establishing fraternal relations. At the same time the rationalism and anti-confessionalism that were taking over Harvard University and invading the New England churches were influencing Lutherans also. Besides examples of this development in catechisms, hymnals, and constitutions of the period, the New York Ministerium elected in 1807 an outspoken rationalist, Fred H. Quitman, as its president. Thus it is no surprise that when the Pennsylvania Ministerium formulated a "proposed plan for a central union" in 1819, it included no strict confessional statement. In 1820 the Synods of Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Maryland and Virginia accepted the plan, and formed the General Synod,

But the two western synods rejected it. The Ohio Synod did so out of the fear that it would threaten the autonomy of local synods. The Tennessee Synod did so because of what it considered doctrinal and confessional laxity in the new body. Thus the spirit of independence, together with the sense of Lutheran confessionalism appeared on the western frontier. When the reaction against rationalism and unionism

became really strong, it came at the same time as an immigration of large numbers of conservative German Lutherans. Furthermore, partially because of the frontier, both of these developments centered in the middle west. As a result, both the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church emerged out of this historical situation. While the eastern Lutherans were involved in the controversies about "New Measurism," revivals, abolition of slavery, and temperance, the midwestern groups were campaigning for orthodox Lutheranism, and against unionism (originally this meant "improper" cooperation with non-Lutheran groups, and later, improper cooperation with other Lutheran bodies not involved in a formal fellowship arrangement), and laxity in doctrine.

CHAPTER II

THE MID-WESTERN SYNODS TO 1881

The Missouri Synod and the three synods which merged in 1930 to form the American Lutheran Church (Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo) had many things in common. They began around the same time. They had their greatest strength in the midwest. They all had German backgrounds. They had similar concerns about confessional integrity and doctrinal purity. It would be understandable that they should have had contacts and made overtures of cooperation with each other. It is also understandable, in view of their concern for true doctrine, that there would also be differences of opinion and even controversy. This was, in fact, the case. These similarities made it inevitable that attempts would be made for over 100 years for closer church fellowship. The differences would contribute to the slow progress these negotiations made.

The Joint Synod of Ohio

The oldest of these groups was the Joint Synod of Ohio. This group held back from the General Synod merger of 1820 out of fear of domination by the eastern synods. It was formed in 1818 out of the Ohio Special Conference of the Pennsylvania Ministerium under the influence of Paul Henkel,

who was also instrumental in forming the Tennessee Synod in 1820. As the flood of German immigrants moved westward, many of the confessionally orthodox Lutherans attached themselves to the Ohio Synod. Most notable among these were a group that was sent by Pastor William Loehe of Neuendettelsau in Germany. Because of an appeal by Friedrich Wyneken, a German minister working at that time for the Pennsylvania Ministerium, Loehe decided to send workers to serve these German Lutheran immigrants. At first these workers joined the Ohio Synod, but for doctrinal and language reasons, withdrew in 1845. Wyneken, along with many others, eventually joined what would be known as the Missouri Synod. As Conrad Bergendoff said,

Three years later the Ohio Synod unequivocally declared its adherence to the Synodical Books, but it was too late, for the Loehe men had now cast their lot with the Missouri Synod.⁸

The influx of German immigrants who were inclined to the more orthodox position gave impetus to the development of the Ohio Synod into a conservative body. The more liberally oriented "American Lutherans" of the English district of the Ohio Synod joined either the General Synod or the General Council. This left control of the Ohio Synod in the hands of the conservative, German element. Thus when the Missouri Synod began to sponsor "free conferences" in 1856, Ohio Synod men were present. These

⁸Bergendoff, The Church of the Lutheran Reformation, p. 232.

conferences were meetings where doctrinal matters were discussed, but where the participants were acting as individuals, not as official representatives of synods. They were held partially in response to the decidedly un-Lutheran "Definite Synodical Platform" proposed in 1865 by S. S. Schumucker. This proposal was such a drastic departure from the historic Lutheran position that Synods which had been at odds with each other began to look for ways to unite in their opposition against this "American Lutheranism", as it was called. In fact, even members of the Pennsylvania and New York Ministeriums, which were more liberal synods from the east, attended this first free conference. Nothing came of these contacts, but there was hope for closer relations between the Missouri and Ohio Synods.

Then in opposition to the definite Platform the Pennsylvania Ministerium in 1866 charged a committee to: prepare and issue a fraternal address to all Evangelical Lutheran Synods, ministers and congregations in the United States and Canada which confess the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, inviting them to unite in a convention for the purpose of forming a Union of Lutheran Synods.⁹

Dr. Charles Porterfield Krauth was a leader in this movement that resulted in the formation of the General Council. The synods of Iowa, Ohio and Missouri, among

⁹Wolf, Documents, pp. 140f.

others, sent representatives to the initial meeting at Reading, Pennsylvania. The Missouri Synod argued for a slow development, based on the free conference idea, but the others rejected this proposal, and therefore the Missouri Synod was not represented at the organizational meeting, held at Ft. Wayne, Indiana. The synods of Ohio and Iowa then raised the question of the "Four Points." They sought clarification on how the proposed church would stand on (1) chiliasm; (2) altar fellowship; (3) pulpit fellowship and (4) secret societies. The answers were not satisfactory to them, basically because they felt there was no provision for disciplinary action within the General Council toward pastors who took the more liberal position. In the opinion of one writer:

The aim of the General Council was to be gradually educational; the German synods of the west desired thorough-going disciplinary regulations. The General Council aimed at genuine Lutheran practice, but the western synods demanded this to a degree that the eastern and older synods could not attain.¹⁰

As a result, the Ohio and Iowa Synods did not join the General Council although the Iowa Synod maintained

¹⁰Theodore Hoyer, "Union Movements in the Church, II," in the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. Proceedings of the Thirty-sixth Convention (Watertown, Wis., 1938), p. 37. The quotation is from a book by Neve, which Hoyer does not specify.

an un-official membership,¹¹ and the synods of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Michigan, and the English Synod of Ohio withdrew in the course of time. Thus when the Ohio Synod investigated the various attempts at a more conservative Lutheranism sponsored on the one hand by the western Missouri Synod and on the other by the eastern Pennsylvania Ministerium, it finally decided to seek closer ties with the Missouri Synod.

Conferences then were held between the Missouri Synod and several of the synods that withdrew from the General Council. The result was a semi-official agreement between the Missouri and Ohio synods, recognizing each other as orthodox Lutheran church bodies in 1868.¹²

From this arrangement it was a short step to the establishment of a wider fellowship called the Synodical Conference, which was organized in 1872 with the synods of Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin and the Norwegian Synod as charter members. The Ohio Synod was not only one of these synods, but it had in fact initiated the whole action. Thus the Ohio Synod had cast its lot with the conservative German Synods. It was in close fellowship with Missouri from 1870 to 1881, when it split

¹¹ Henry Eyster Jacobs, A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States, Vol. IV: The American Church History Series (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1893). p. 481; Robert C. Wiederaenders and Walter G. Tillmanns, The Synods of American Lutheranism (n.p.: Lutheran Historical Conference, 1968), p. 147.

¹² Wolf, Documents, pp. 183f.

away from the Missouri Synod and the Synodical Conference over the Predestinarian Controversy.

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri,
Ohio, and other States

This church body was organized in 1847. The beginnings of this group however, go back to Germany in the 1830's. Two factors worked together to produce a mass migration to the mid-western United States by a group of conservative Lutherans. The first factor was the official attempt to unify the Protestant elements in the country. This idea, whenever it had been tried in Germany, starting with the Prussian Union in 1817, produced much opposition among the conservative, confessional Lutherans. The second factor, the real catalyst for this migration, was the personality of Pastor Martin Stephan. He was pastor of the semi-autonomous Bohemian Church, St. John's, in Dresden. In this position, he was able to preach and teach his own kind of orthodoxy with a minimum of control by the authorities. In the process, he became the undisputed leader of the orthodox group in Saxony. His leadership was the result of his ability to give stability and assurance to searching souls and consciences frightened by Pietistic excesses. He asserted that his group was the true church, and that the means of saving grace resided with him.

Since Stephan eventually disagreed with almost everyone, a simple conclusion was that all other views represented in the Church were false; only Stephanism was right. In fact the claim was finally made not only that Stephanism was the only right Church ("Die wahre Kirche," as Marbach phrased it), but that it alone was a Church. The Stephanites were The Church.¹³

Loyalty to Stephan became an important issue, and a group began to develop that was ready and willing to follow Stephan to America to establish the church there, free from all opposition. Economic motivations were indeed involved, but the underlying factor that caused the migration was the religious controversy. The zealous followers of Stephan justified their leaving by saying that if they stayed they risked damnation in the State Church.

Over 600 people sailed in 1838. Most of them arrived in St. Louis in early 1839. Their arrival produced the following news article in the German newspaper Anzeiger des Westens.

We must announce to our readers the arrival of the first two shiploads of Stephanites--together about 300 persons. Among their number are men of mature years who lived in very good circumstances in their homeland--men whom only the misrepresentation on the part of their parsons that if they should die in Europe they could not be saved, could mislead into taking the unusual step of emigrating at such an advanced age, and into taking the still more

¹³Walter O. Forster, Zion on the Mississippi, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 64. Forster has eighteen lines of bibliographical citations to show that this was indeed what the group believed.

dangerous one of investing their entire capital in the nebulous project of a communal settlement. As matters now stand, the intellectual [spiritual?] and secular affairs of the community rest almost without any control in the hands of the clergy, who enjoy unqualified authority and obedience in their sect.¹⁴

They settled in St. Louis and nearby Perry County. All seemed under control. Stephan had been named Bishop and had obtained sworn statements from the colonists to obey him in everything. For a time just getting settled took most of their energy. Then rumors began circulating about improper activities of their pastor, their spiritual leader, Stephan. At first, the members of the fellowship refused to believe these rumors. Finally it was evident that he had not only misused the group's funds but had committed adultery with several of the women in the group. At this the resentment toward his dictatorship and the frustrations at the difficult life they were leading broke out. C. F. W. Walther, a young clergyman of the group, took the lead in discrediting Stephan as leader. To be sure, there was evidence that similar things had taken place in Germany, but at that time his followers had been unwilling to believe ill of him. Now that they were thoroughly disillusioned, it was a different story. On May 27, 1839, the pastors prepared a statement on Stephan's guilt for publication in the Anzeiger des Westens.¹⁵ On May 30 Stephan was deposed by the colony

¹⁴Ibid., p. 107.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 413.

assembled in Perry County and subsequently escorted across the Mississippi to Illinois, with a promise never to return (a promise broken several times in futile attempts to gain support).

This whole experience was very traumatic for the Saxons. They had left their homes and traveled half-way around the world in order to establish a true church postulated on the authority of their spiritual leader Stephan. Now he was gone, and the inevitable questions arose. "Do we have a right to stay? Are we even A church, much less The Church?" A lay group led by a lawyer, C. E. Vehse, drew up a statement, fortified by quotations from Luther and orthodox Lutheran writers, that rejected the Stephanistic, hierarchical, clergy-dominated concept of church government. In its place, they presented a type of church government based on the priesthood of all believers.

As spiritual priests, laymen have the right to judge all doctrine and to supervise all activities of the clergy . . . The final decision in all disputes rests with the local congregation . . . The local congregation has the power and the duty to establish all rules regarding liturgy, ceremony and church constitutions . . . The True Church is invisible . . . It is dangerous to judge people as to doctrine and as to their faithfulness over against established teachers . . . equally dangerous is the habit of extolling clergymen as a class because such a habit engenders servility and hypocrisy . . . The concept of the Ecclesia Repraesentativa, i.e., that the church is represented in the clergy, leads to the Papacy and to a lack of interest in church matters on the part of the laity . . . All pastors should be placed on the same level and exercise the same power. The

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 episcopacy developed love of personal glory and leads to the Papacy . . . Stephan taught false doctrine concerning the church, concerning church polity, concerning secular government, concerning the office of the ministry, concerning excommunication, and concerning the cure of soul.¹⁶

These are all parts of Vehse's statement. This brought about a struggle in the fellowship. Some were completely disillusioned and felt that they should return to Germany because the whole emigration had been wrong, or at least unnecessary. Some of the pastors, apparently with feelings of guilt, made numerous public confessions, thereby further undermining their authority before the laymen who were ready to substitute an oligarchy of laymen for the hierarchy of the pastors.¹⁷

This whole confused situation came to its climax in the Altenburg Debate. The public debate between the leader of the lay party, a lawyer named F. A. Marbach, and Pastor C. F. W. Walther, was held on April 15 and 20, 1841, in Altenburg, Perry County. Marbach's position was that the basis of church government under Stephan and the clergy was sinful, and the only way to end this

¹⁶Carl S. Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 99.

¹⁷For several years after the Stephan debacle, the governing body of Trinity congregation, St. Louis, the Voters' Assembly, did not permit the pastor to attend their meetings. Ibid., pp. 107f.

affair with the blessing of God was to return to Germany.

The theses presented by Walther emphasized that:

- I. The true Church is invisible.
- II. The True Church will exist wherever Gods' word is taught and the Sacraments administered correctly.
- III. This can also be said of those "visible companies of men who have united under the confessions of a falsified faith, and therefore have incurred the guilt of a partial departure from the truth; provided that they possess so much of God's word and the Holy Sacraments in purity that children of God may thereby be born.¹⁸
- IV. Members of the invisible church are also found in heterodox bodies.
- V. This is true even if the heterodox church separates from the visible orthodox church.
- VI. Even in heterodox visible churches, the powers of the church, that is, the valid and efficacious administration of the Means of Grace are present.
- VII. "Even heterodox companies are not to be dissolved, but reformed."¹⁹
and
- VIII. The orthodox church is judged by the "common, orthodox, public confessions upon which its members recognize themselves to have pledged and to which they have confessed,"²⁰ (and not by what church polity is followed).

Walther's views carried the day. Some of the group, including Marbach, returned to Germany. But most had burned their bridges behind them. Walther had put their minds at ease. They might not insist on their earlier

¹⁸D. H. Steffens, "The Doctrine of the Church and the Minister," in Ebenezer, ed. by Wm. H. T. Dau (augmented edition; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), p. 144.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 145

²⁰Ibid.

contention that they were The true church, but at least they could know that their fellowship was God-pleasing, and that they were a church.

This whole traumatic experience had profound significance. Walther became the undisputed leader of the Saxons until his death in 1887. He served at various times as President of the Missouri Synod, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and of the Synodical Conference. The Altenburg theses formed the basis for several books by Walther on the church including The Church and the Ministry, The Correct Form of a Local Congregation Independent of the State and The Evangelical Lutheran Church The True Visible Church on Earth.²¹ These writings and the ideas in them formed the basis of the distinctive church polity espoused by the Missouri Synod. Walther was indeed one of the four outstanding personalities in the history of the Lutheran Church in America.²²

This contribution [of his ideas on church government] may well be called his greatest, in so far as it was the sine qua non of all that was to follow in his eventful life as leader of the Saxons and of the Missouri Synod.²³

²¹Carl S. Meyer, ed., Moving Frontiers, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), pp. 164-66. These are summarized and discussed in a book commemorating the centennial of the Saxon immigration, William Dallmann, W. H. I. Dau, and Theodore Engelder, Walther and the Church, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938).

²²Wentz, History of Lutheranism, p. 111.

²³Forster, Zion on the Mississippi, p. 525.

The Missouri group stayed to carry out their original plans, determined to establish a truly Lutheran church in America. The Altenburg Debate not only furnished a model for further Missouri deliberations but also stimulated lay interest in theological matters. This development helps to explain why throughout its history the Missouri Synod has emphasized purity in doctrine, since the concern for pure doctrine was shared down to the grass-roots, and laymen also have been on the alert for doctrinal deviations.

Finally this concept of the church, hammered out through Sturm und Drang, became a bone of contention between the Missouri Synod and the other conservative Lutheran bodies. The doctrines of the church and the ministry have been sources of controversy throughout the history of the Missouri Synod.

Their place in the communion of the saved now secure, the Saxons began to look for other parts of the true Lutheran church. One group soon found them. Pastor J. A. A. Grabau had left Prussia with a group of German Lutherans in opposition to the Prussian Union. They had arrived a few months after the Saxons, settling around Buffalo, New York, and Milwaukee. They were a larger group to begin with than the Saxons, but never achieved anything like the eventual size of the Missouri Synod. Because their leader lived in Buffalo, they became known as the Buffalo Synod.

Grabau was very close to Stephan in his approach to church polity and the authority of the minister. Therefore, when he sent a pastoral letter to a number of his congregations in 1840, warning them against pastors who were improperly ordained, he sent a copy to the Saxons "for their criticism."²⁴ The timing of this pastoral letter indicates that Grabau was hoping to fill the vacuum left by the departure of Stephan. But the ecclesiology of the lay party in Missouri, by then fortified and sanctified by Walther at the Altenburg Debate, was no longer congenial to hierarchical rule. The Saxons, stung once, were not going to exchange the rule of Stephan for that of Grabau. To their credit, they did not answer Grabau hurriedly but waited until 1843. They recognized a fellow fighter for Lutheran confessionalism and gave an answer only after Grabau had repeatedly prodded them. That answer was predictable; it was later developed into Walther's book, Kirche und Amt.²⁵ Whereas Walther and the Saxons had found the answer to their anguish in the idea of the invisible church, namely, that the church is wherever the means of grace are regenerating new Christians, Grabau and the

²⁴Arthur Both, "The Missouri Synod and the Buffalo Synod," in Ebenezer, p. 125; Steffens, "Church and the Ministry," in Ebenezer, p. 148, where this request is described as asking for a "Gutachten, or theological opinion."

²⁵A summary of the Saxons' answer is given by Steffens on p. 149.

Buffalo Synod emphasized the visible church. To Grabau, as to Stephan, the church depended on the ministry for its existence. Whereas Walther and the Saxons said that the authority of the minister depended on the call of the congregation, Grabau and the Buffalo Synod insisted that proper ordination made the ministry valid. Obviously, the Saxons would not accept Grabau's leadership. Grabau did the only consistent thing; he excommunicated the Saxons from the Christian Church. Thus the first external controversy involving the Missouri Synod, like the first internal struggle, had to do with the doctrine of the church and the ministry. Since its very beginning then, the Missouri Synod has been concerned with matters of the church and of church fellowship, which explains why throughout its history it has shown a seeming preoccupation with "unionism" and church fellowship.

But even if they were unable to have a meeting of minds with the Prussians, the Saxons still sought to forge closer relations with the other conservative Lutherans. In 1844 Walther began publishing a journal called Der Lutheraner which is still in existence today. Its expressed purposes were to familiarize the readers with the doctrines of the Lutheran church in order to prove that it was the true visible church, to teach the reader how to live a God-pleasing life, and to expose false

doctrines, especially among Lutheran churches.²⁶ This journal alerted other conservative Lutherans to the Saxons' arrival in America and to their doctrinal position. As a result, a series of meetings with other, non-Saxon clergymen led to the formation of the Deutsche Evangelischen Lutherischen Synode von Missouri, Ohio, und andern Staaten in 1847.²⁷

The most influential congregation of the Saxons, Trinity in St. Louis, suggested several significant changes for the proposed Synodical Constitution. These helped to give the Missouri Synod a distinctive nature. These changes reflected the fear of domination by the clergy, brought about by the sad episode with Stephan. One change expressly said that the synod remain an advisory body in relation to the congregation. Another change stipulated that the voting strength of the clergymen in synodical decisions must never exceed the voting strength of the laymen. So if a church had more than one pastor, only one could vote. If a pastor was without a congregation, he could be only an advisory member of the synod. At the same time, if two or more congregations were served by one pastor, they would share one vote among them.²⁸

²⁶H. Birkner, "'Der Lutheraner' from 1844 to 1847," in Ebenezer, p. 43.

²⁷This was the original name. The Synod dropped the word "German" in 1917 and changed its name to "The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod" in 1947.

²⁸For a further discussion of these changes, see Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod, pp. 177ff.

The founding of the Missouri Synod came at a propitious time. 1,500,000 people had immigrated to the United States from Germany by 1860.²⁹ Many of those who were Lutheran were attracted more by the conservative German synods of the midwest than by the more liberal, English-speaking synods of the east. The Missouri Synod began in 1847 with congregations in six states; by 1872 it was represented in twenty-four. It was soon the largest of the midwest synods, indeed the largest single synod in America. This can be explained partially by its own zeal, partially by its system of parochial schools, partially by its publications, which even acquainted emigrants with its position before they left Germany, and partially by the high quality of its leaders.³⁰

The Missouri Synod sponsored free conference from 1856 to 1859, was invited to the discussions that led to the formation of the General Council, and was a leader in establishing the Synodical Conference. As an indication of this leadership the Synodical Conference elected Walther its first president. But this very predominance, and the impression evidently given by the Missouri Synod that it was somewhat more orthodox than the other synods, whether this

²⁹Bachmann, "Churches of North America," In Lutheran Churches of the World, p. 145.

³⁰Wentz, History of Lutheranism, p. 202; Birkner, "Der Lutheraner," pp. 48ff; John H. C. Fritz, "Missouri and Iowa," in Ebenezer, p. 163; Munding, Government in the Missouri Synod, pp. 216f.

was a false impression or not, sowed the seeds of conflict which broke out in the predestinarian controversy. So in 1924 The Lutheran, the journal of the United Lutheran Church in America said,

When a synod for 75 years emphasizes separateness, hero-worship, and hyperholiness, it must continually build higher and stronger fences about its membership to keep them.³¹

Heinrich Maurer in his sociological discussion of the Missouri Synod written in 1925 explained those fences to be the result of fear, fear of contamination from false doctrine or rationalism, and just as important, fear of losing identity and continuity through premature mixing with others of another fellowship.³² He said that Missouri's creed-fundamentalism "serves as a corral, a fence; it is the wall of the Feste Burg; its purpose is integration within and integrity over and against the without."³³ This attitude has significance for the entire history of this group.

The Buffalo Synod

Although the Buffalo Synod formed only a small part of the American Lutheran picture, its history needs also to be

³¹"Across the Desk", The Lutheran, VI (August 28, 1924), p. 3.

³²Heinrich H. Maurer, "Studies in the Sociology of Religion. IV. The Problems of Group-Consensus; Founding the Missouri Synod," American Journal of Sociology, XXX (May, 1925), 668ff; "VI, The Consciousness of Kind of a Fundamentalist Group," American Journal of Sociology, XXXI (Jan., 1926), 486ff.

³³Ibid., p. 494.

mentioned. J. A. A. Grabau was able to maintain a fair amount of leadership over his followers while he lived. Until his death in 1879 the Buffalo Synod was probably as close as any Lutheran body in America to an episcopalian system of church government. Grabau taught that the church is visible, gathered around the Word and Sacraments, "in purity in the ministry."³⁴ Therefore only those are saved who are connected with the true visible church, identified by true doctrine and properly called and ordained pastors.³⁵ Pastors are properly called not by the congregation, as the Missouri Synod taught, but by the assistance of another minister. Furthermore he taught that the clergy, by virtue of their office, should command obedience in all things not contrary to the Word of God. But this kind of polity did not fit with the times nor with the place. Missouri was finally able to hold a colloquium with representatives of the Buffalo Synod in 1866, at which time the various doctrines connected with the church were discussed. The doctrines of the Missouri Synod were so persuasive that eleven pastors of the Buffalo Synod, a majority of their pastors at that time, left Buffalo and joined Missouri. From then on, the Buffalo

³⁴Both, "The Missouri Synod and the Buffalo Synod," in Ebenezer, p. 127, quoting Grabau's Fifth Pastoral Letter, p. 9.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 127-133.

Synod was barely able to hold the descendants of its original colonists.³⁶ Then after Grabau's death it adopted a much more congregational polity, but the scars of the conflict with the Missouri Synod would last for decades.

The Iowa Synod

The final German midwestern synod organized was the Iowa Synod. William Loehe had sent pastors and colonists from Germany to the new world. One group of colonists settled in the Saginaw Valley in Michigan for work among the Indians. Another colony eventually went to Iowa. Most of these "Sendlinge" joined the Missouri Synod. At first Loehe was very enthusiastic about the Saxon group. But after the Altenburg Debate and subsequent events he began to have second thoughts, because he could not quite agree with the Missouri Synod's ideas on the church. Most of his pastors, including Wyneken and William Sihler of Ft. Wayne, Indiana, were won over by Walther and the Saxons to their point of view. Loehe continued to question the Missouri Synod's position, and in 1851 things had gotten to such a point that the synod sent its two leaders, Walther and Wyneken, to Bavaria to discuss the situation with Loehe in person. Despite the warm reception they

³⁶Wentz, *History of Lutheranism*, p. 114; P. H. Buehring, *The Spirit of the American Lutheran Church*, (Columbus, O: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1940), pp. 29ff.

received, they were unable to win Loehe over. - At about the same time, Grabau also visited Loehe, and although Loehe could not completely agree with him either, Grabau confirmed his fears as to what he considered the Missouri Synod's extreme congregationalism. Loehe held a mediating position between the Missouri and Buffalo synods. Although he objected to the congregation having sole jurisdiction in calling pastors, he felt it should certainly have some part in their calling and ordination, and he did not agree with Grabau on his extreme ideas of pastoral authority.

As a result of this difference with the Missouri Synod, the Loehe colony in Iowa organized the Iowa Synod in 1854. Not only did it differ from the Missouri Synod on the doctrine of the church and the ministry, it was also opposed to what it considered the Missouri Synod's legalistic approach to the Lutheran Confessions. The Missouri Synod felt that all teachings of the Bible were binding. The Iowa group took a different approach. They said that where the Lutheran Confessions were not explicit, or where their statements were historically conditioned, at these points there could be a certain leeway. Therefore they felt that these "Open Questions" were not divisive of church fellowship. Among the doctrines classified in this way were the idea that the Sabbath regulations were still in effect for Sunday, the question whether the Pope was the final Antichrist, and the teaching that at the end of time there would be an initial

resurrection of the martyrs and a millenium.³⁷ These doctrines were not held officially by the Iowa Synod. It did maintain that these doctrines were not sufficiently explicit in the Lutheran Confessions to be divisive of church fellowship.³⁸ These doctrines were not traditionally Lutheran but represented doctrines current in Protestantism at that time. The Iowa Synod wanted to be Lutheran, and insisted on the Lutheran Confessions as binding, but it did not wish to be so strict as to alienate anybody, whether American Protestants or German Lutherans from Neuendettelsau, where these doctrines were taught. As a result, the Iowa Synod found itself somewhat isolated from the other Lutheran synods of the midwest.³⁹

For although the Missouri Synod had the strictest approach to doctrine (called legalistic and intolerant by the Iowa Synod) the Ohio, Buffalo, Wisconsin, and the other German synods of the conservative branch held to the idea that there should be no equivocation on doctrinal issues. When the "Four Points" were raised at the General Council organizational meeting, the Iowa Synod not only

³⁷Wolf, Documents, pp. 207f; Fritz, "Missouri and Iowa," in Ebenezer, pp. 166ff.

³⁸Wolf, Documents, p. 209, where in the Theses on "What is Essential to Church Unity?" by the Iowa Synod in 1867 it says: "Complete unity of doctrine has never existed in the church and must not be made the condition of fellowship."

³⁹Ibid., p. 207.

did not raise the point of chiliasm (millennialism) along with the Ohio Synod, but also maintained an unofficial membership in the General Council after all the other midwestern synods had withdrawn and joined the Synodical Conference. In this it was being consistent, for it said all along that it regarded no disruption of church fellowship to exist because of the Four Points. Indeed, it did not even announce a break with the Missouri Synod until the Predestinarian Controversy, in spite of all the bitter struggles preceding it for thirty years.

This whole "open questions" controversy agitated the Lutheran Church for years. There was a colloquy at Milwaukee in 1867 between the Iowa and Missouri Synod representatives, but no agreement was reached. Walther wrote several articles on open questions in his theological journal, Lehre und Wehre, in 1868. In these he conceded that there could never be absolute agreement on doctrine and that there is a difference between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines, but he insisted that where the Bible clearly taught something, this could not be treated lightly.⁴⁰ He insisted that there could be only one correct interpretation of a Biblical doctrine where the passages were clear. His main concern in this argument, he said,

⁴⁰C. F. W. Walther, "The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions," trans. by W. Arndt, Concordia Theological Monthly, XI (April, 1939), 260-262; Theodore Graebner, The Historic Lutheran Position in Non-Fundamentals (St. Louis: 1939), pp. 21f.

was the attitude of a party in the controversy as to the Scriptures.⁴¹ The Iowa Synod was willing to substitute the term "theological problems" for "open questions," but the two churches could not agree on what would be included under this heading. In fact, the confusion over what the term "open questions" meant was to cause controversy into the 1940s.⁴²

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 23f, quoting from Walther in an article in Der Lutheraner, May 1, 1871.

⁴²In 1939 the Concordia Theological Monthly printed a translation of Walther's Lehre und Wehre articles in 1868, under the title "False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions." X, 4-11 (April to November, 1939), 154-262, 351-357, 415-420, 507-513, 587-595, 656-666, 752-759, 827-834. The original essay was titled "Die falschen Stuetzender, moderner Theorie von den offener Fragen," Lehre und Wehre, XIV (April-October, 1868), 100-114, 129-141, 161-169, 201-211, 233-240, 297-305. In 1940 it translated his article, "Propositions on the Modern Theory of Open Questions." XI (April, 1940, 298-299. Paul H. Burgdorf, the editor of The Confessional Lutheran, an unofficial journal opposed to fellowship with the American Lutheran Church, published some articles challenging the idea that Walther allowed for fellowship with those who disagreed on "non-fundamental" doctrines. These articles are "Dr. Walther's Position on Non-Fundamentals and the Ft. Wayne Resolution of the Missouri Synod," The Confessional Lutheran, III, (Jan., 1942), 1-4; and "Walther's Theses on the Modern Theory of Open Questions," The Confessional Lutheran, I (April, 1940), 20-22; (June, 1940), 39-40; (July, 1940), 46-47; (August, 1940), 55-56; II (February, 1941), 22-24; (July, 1941), 79-82; III (January, 1942), 8-10. In addition, other men within the Synodical Conference wrote on this subject. J. H. Gockel, "For a Re-Study of So-Called Non-Fundamentals," The American Lutheran, XXV (June, 1942), 6-8; Theodore Graebner, The Historic Lutheran Position on Non-Fundamentals, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1939); Theodore Hanssen, The Historical Open Questions Among American Lutherans, (Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1936); a mimeographed paper by P. E. Kretzmann, "Fundamental and Non-Fundamental Doctrines and Church Fellowship;" and S. C. Ylvisaker, "The Question of Non-Fundamentals in the Light of Scripture," in the Norwegian

The Iowa Synod insisted that open questions were theological problems. It said in its Davenport Theses of 1873:

- XVI. In the course of our Ecclesiastical controversies, the fundamental difference between Missouri and Iowa has been on "open questions," the existence of which we have acknowledged and proved, but which Missouri has energetically denied.
- XVII. "Open questions", in this sense cannot be doctrines which are necessary to salvation or to the existence of the church, but only such as are not touched upon in God's word at all, or at least are not taught in perfectly clear passages of Scripture--doctrines, therefore, on which no consensus has been reached, in the church, but with respect to which varieties of opinion have always been found among orthodox teachers. In addition to the points mentioned above, [the doctrine of the Anti-Christ, the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry, and the doctrine of the millenium] we include among these doctrines the interpretations of Sunday, i.e., that in the New Testament the observance of a particular day in no-wise rests upon a divine command, but only upon an inner necessity.

Missouri, on the other hand, regards it as unionism to speak of doctrinal opinions which may be permitted to stand side-by-side in the church, and at the colloquy at Milwaukee declared that such a difference could be tolerated only in regard to points concerning which God's word contains no statement at all: in all doctrines drawn from the Scriptures, whether or not they bear on faith or life, there dare be only one interpretation.⁴³

Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church. Report of the Twenty-third Regular Convention (Minneapolis, Minn., 1940), pp. 14-27.

⁴³Wolf, Documents, pp. 211f.

But these ideas received little support from other synods at the time.

This is the way matters stood in 1880. The Missouri Synod was at the height of its success. It had forged a confederation in the Synodical Conference of all the midwestern synods except Iowa and the Swedish Illinois Synod, later to be known as the Augustana Synod. It was already the largest single synod in America. Its theological influence was widespread. Both the General Synod and the General Council had become more conservative, at least partially because of the influence of the Missouri Synod. Its seminary in St. Louis was a center of conservative Lutheranism. The Norwegian Synod was using it to train its ministers. The Ohio Synod's seminary at Columbus, Ohio, acknowledged the talent and influence of Walther, the President of the Concordia Seminary at St. Louis and its leading theologian, by conferring the degree of Doctor of Divinity on him in 1878. The conservative synods that did not agree with the Missouri Synod were seemingly in eclipse. The Buffalo Synod was small and insignificant. The Iowa Synod was isolated from the others because of its more lenient approach to doctrine. The seeming success of the Synodical Conference appeared to vindicate the Missouri Synod's approach to unity, which was so long denied to the more liberal bodies of the East. But this was the lull before the storm.

CHAPTER III

FROM THE PREDESTINARIAN CONTROVERSY TO 1929

The Origins of the Controversy

In 1881 a controversy on the doctrine of Predestination flared into the open within the Synodical Conference. It had been smoldering for a number of years. Essays read on the subject at a Missouri Synod District Convention in 1868 and at an Ohio Synod District Convention in 1869 seemed to have started the controversy.⁴⁴ Then Professor Gottfried Fritschel of the Iowa Synod in 1872 took issue with the Missouri Synod position and called it "crypto-Calvinism."⁴⁵ Walther and others entered into the controversy. Professor F. A. Schmidt, then professor for the Norwegian Synod at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, wrote against Fritschel's position in Lehre und Wehre in 1874. However, the real

⁴⁴Carl S. Meyer, "Ohio's Accord with Missouri, 1868-1880," in The Maturing of American Lutheranism, ed. by Herbert T. Neve and Benjamin A. Johnson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968), p. 186; Fred. W. Meuser, The Formation of the American Lutheran Church (Columbus, O.: The Wartburg Press, 1958), p. 64.

⁴⁵Walter A. Baepler, A Century of Grace (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 199. Meuser, however, says that the origin of the conflict was in Fritschel's answer to a Missouri District essay of the Missouri Synod in 1870. Formation, p. 70.

controversy began in connection with an essay on predestination read at the Western District Convention of the Missouri Synod in 1877 by Walther. This was a part of an on-going essay, entitled: "The Doctrine of the Lutheran Church Alone Gives All Glory to God--An Irrefutable Proof That Its Doctrine is the Only True Doctrine". This essay contained a thesis:

It is false and incorrect to teach that not only the mercy of God and the most holy merit of Christ but also in us there is a cause for the Election of God, for which reason God has elected us to eternal life.⁴⁶

In this connection Walther also attacked the idea that God elected those that are saved in view of their faith (Intuitu fidei). This was a term that had been used by the seventeenth-century dogmatists, although often in an ambiguous way.

Walther pointed out, in the 1877 essay and in subsequent writings, that this phrase and the idea it symbolized was neither Biblical nor according to the Lutheran Confessions. His main emphasis was that the Lutheran Church had always taught all their doctrines in such a way as to give God all glory absolutely for man's salvation, including credit for his faith.⁴⁷ Therefore he felt that anyone who taught that God elects a man to salvation because God foresees his faith was teaching synergism. His opponents felt not only that the

⁴⁶Meyer, ed., Moving Frontiers, p. 268.

⁴⁷Wentz, History of Lutheranism, pp. 205f.

Intuitu fidei idea had solid Lutheran credentials, but that Walther's position made God's election too arbitrary, and therefore Calvinistic. There were a number of other doctrinal points included in this controversy,⁴⁸ but the Intuitu fidei was the main one. Henry Jacobs, writing just a few years after the most bitter part of the controversy, described the differences between the Missouri Synod and its opponents this way:

Ohio and Iowa; in view of faith in the merits of Christ, men are elected unto salvation.

Missouri; in view of the merits of Christ, men are elected to faith for salvation.⁴⁹

Walther's opponents could quote from the seventeenth-century Lutheran dogmaticians, but Walther could insist on the literal words of the Lutheran Confessions of the sixteenth-century. So perhaps the old problem could have been resolved amicably had not personal factors entered in. The most vehement opponents of Walther and the Missouri Synod were former members of the Missouri Synod who had defected to other synods because of the controversy.

The controversy was started in earnest by that same Professor F. A. Schmidt mentioned before. Although he had previously defended Walther's position, in 1879 he objected to his views and notified the President of the Missouri Synod

⁴⁸J. T. Mueller, "The Predestinarian Controversy," in Ebenezer, pp. 414-417, mentions nine doctrinal points at issue.

⁴⁹Jacobs, A History, p. 504.

that he would make it a public issue unless they were retracted. What had happened? It is hard to say with complete accuracy, but two things had occurred in 1878 that have a bearing on the situation. In that year, Schmidt, formerly at the St. Louis Seminary but at that time at the Norwegian Seminary in Madison, Wisconsin, had indicated in correspondence with a District President in the Missouri Synod that he was available for a professorship at St. Louis as eventual successor to Walther. He was not elected "out of consideration for the Norwegian Synod."⁵⁰ Evidently he felt that the real reason for this was Walther's opposition.⁵¹ When the Synodical Conference Convention in 1878 approved Walther's district essay of 1877, Schmidt began to object, despite the fact that he had made no objection previously. Thus his rejection for the post at the Seminary and the Synodical approval of Walther's theses came at the same time. Evidently these things precipitated the angry outburst of Schmidt against Walther. Schmidt could not be persuaded to keep the argument private, and began to publish a journal Altes und Neues in which he attacked

⁵⁰Mueller, "The Predestinarian Controversy," in Ebenezer, p. 409. Instead of Schmidt, Francis Pieper was called to the post. He would become the leading theologian of the Missouri Synod in the first half of the twentieth century and the principal author of "The Brief Statement" that was to figure so prominently in the fellowship discussions of the 1930s.

⁵¹Meyer, ed., Moving Frontiers, p. 271.

Walther and his "crypto-Calvinism." This led to a special Missouri Synod Pastoral Conference in Chicago on September 29, 1880, with about 500 pastors attending. This constituted about one-half of its pastors at that time. Then on January 5, 1881, a meeting was held between representatives of the Missouri Synod and the Ohio Synod. These meetings produced no agreement, since those opposed to Walther within the Missouri Synod engaged in extended debate, with the result that the antagonisms were increased. Schmidt and those that agreed with him were determined to wage war.⁵²

The Split in the Synodical Conference

In the Missouri Synod Convention in May, 1881, Walther presented thirteen theses on predestination, which were officially adopted.⁵³ The convention instructed its delegates to the forthcoming Synodical Conference convention:

You are not to sit together and deliberate about Church affairs with such as have publicly decried us as Calvinists . . . you recognize no synod as a member of the Synodical Conference which as a synod has accused us of Calvinism.⁵⁴

⁵²Baepler, A Century of Grace, p. 201. Meuser indicates that those in the Missouri Synod against Walther engaged in extended theological debate, with the result that antagonisms increased. Formation, p. 67.

⁵³Wolf, Documents, pp. 199-203.

⁵⁴Baepler, A Century of Grace, p. 202.

The gauntlet was down, and men and synods began to choose sides. The Iowa Synod, long at odds with Missouri, had nevertheless never said that the Missouri Synod's "false doctrines" were divisive of fellowship. But when the Missouri Synod's convention adopted Walther's thirteen theses, the Iowa Synod, believing that the Missouri Synod was guilty of serious error as a church body, entered the controversy. The situation in the Ohio was a little different.⁵⁵ It held a special convention in September, 1881. At that time it resolved to withdraw from the Synodical Conference, but the reasons given were not entirely related to the predestination issue. The Ohio Synod's concern was also over the Missouri Synod's decision to discontinue fellowship with those who disagreed with her. The Ohio Synod felt that since former members of the Missouri Synod were asking for membership in the Ohio Synod, and some of its delegates to the Synodical Conference convention were among those that had accused the Missouri Synod of false doctrine, a decision would have to be made. The Missouri Synod would certainly refuse to recognize the delegates of the Ohio Synod at the convention. So the Ohio Synod said: The procedure of the Missouri Synod compels us to fix our position on the burning question as decidedly as she has done.⁵⁶ Therefore it resolved simply

⁵⁵Wolf, Documents, p. 198.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 205.

to withdraw from the Synodical Conference.⁵⁷ Thus as much as anything, as Jacobs said, the controversy "was the direct result of Missouri's denial of the existence of 'open questions' within the Lutheran Church."⁵⁸ There was also dissatisfaction over several recommendations that the Missouri Synod was making to the Synodical Conference. These had to do with re-aligning the synods into state synods, and combining the theological faculties of the various synods in the Synodical Conference. This would have meant that the Ohio Synod's Seminary in Columbus, Ohio would have been moved to St. Louis. The Ohio Synod saw these things as threats to its strength. Furthermore, the relations between Walther and the leading theologians of the Ohio Synod were not especially cordial.⁵⁹

There were other personalities involved. The former members of the Missouri Synod who had joined other synods led the fight against their old associates. Perhaps the most important man in the Ohio Synod in this connection was Professor F. W. Stellhorn, who had taught at the Missouri Synod's Concordia College in Ft. Wayne, Indiana. After he left the Missouri Synod, he was called to the Ohio Synod's Seminary at Columbus, Ohio. It is not

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 206.

⁵⁸Jacobs, A History, p. 502.

⁵⁹Meyer, "Ohio's Accord with Missouri, 1868-1880," in The Maturing of American Lutheranism, p. 200.

difficult to understand a personality clash between him and Walther as at least a partial explanation for the controversy. In addition to Stelhorn, there were a number of other pastors who joined the Ohio Synod, and several of them were active in the polemics that followed. When someone defects to the enemy, it is often the case that he becomes an outspoken critic of his former side. That is what happened here. In fact, these former Missouri Synod men seemed to have been the foremost polemicists against the Missouri Synod in the Ohio Synod. On the other hand, fourteen pastors from the Ohio Synod eventually joined the Missouri Synod over the issue.⁶⁰

Even after the Ohio Synod left the Synodical Conference, the battle continued within this federation. F. A. Schmidt came to the 1881 convention as a lay delegate from the Norwegian Synod. The Missouri Synod group then refused to recognize him, and they and the Wisconsin Synod held the majority of the votes. The Norwegian Synod was then faced with a choice between backing Schmidt or staying in the

⁶⁰Among these was C. A. Frank who had an interesting career. In 1869 he had been a leader in a joint conference between pastors of the Missouri and Ohio Synods in the Pittsburgh area. We find him at the Ohio Synod seminary as a professor in 1878. Then in 1882 he formed "The Concordia Synod of Pennsylvania and other states" with thirteen other pastors. This group finally joined the Missouri Synod in 1888. He then became a leader in the English Synod work of the Missouri Synod, becoming the first editor of The Lutheran Witness. Meyer, "Ohio's Accord," pp. 186f; Baepier, A Century of Grace, p. 196 and 202. Robert C. Wiederaenders and Walter Tillmans, The Synods of American Lutheranism ([St Louis]: Lutheran Historical Conference, 1968), pp. 120f.

Synodical Conference. The issue became so vehement that the Norwegian Synod resolved to leave the Synodical Conference to avoid a split within their own ranks over it.⁶¹ Schmidt continued to agitate from his position at the Norwegian Synod seminary and finally in 1887 persuaded an "Anti-Missourian Brotherhood" to split off from the Norwegian Lutheran Church, taking about one-third of its members along. This very name shows the way they felt about the situation. As Wentz said, there were those in the Norwegian Synod "impatient with the rigid orthodoxy and exclusiveness of Missouri."⁶²

Although there had been other inter-synodical conflicts in American Lutheranism, the liturgical and confessional controversy within the General Synod and the linguistic controversy within the General Council going at this same time,⁶³ the predestinarian controversy has been perhaps the worst, with the most far-reaching results. It ended any hope of a unified Lutheran church for decades. It isolated the Missouri Synod and caused it to be bitter and distrustful about fellowship with other synods. It caused the Ohio and Iowa synods to re-evaluate their

⁶¹S. C. Ylvisaker, "The Missouri Synod and the Norwegians," in *Ebenezer*, p. 267 says that the Norwegians also left for ethnic and linguistic reasons; they could not follow the discussions easily because they were in German.

⁶²Wentz, *History of Lutheranism*, p. 251.

⁶³Jacobs, *A History*, pp. 505ff.

positions over against each other. Not only did they have a common enemy, Missouri, but they found a common approach to the doctrines of the church and fellowship. This eventually led to the American Lutheran Church merger in 1930. The predestinarian controversy also seriously weakened the Synodical Conference and pushed it further to the theological right. For although the main issue was the doctrine of election, "it could not be resolved because of different attitudes toward the Confessions and the interpretation of Scripture."⁶⁴

The Reconciliation of Iowa and Ohio

The predestinarian controversy split midwestern Lutheranism in the 1880's. But this was inevitable and perhaps even served a good purpose. For the union in the Synodical Conference was more apparent than real. Not only did the controversy reveal differences in doctrine, but it also showed differences in the attitudes of the church bodies towards each other. When we see the Missouri Synod accused over and over again of being self-righteous, narrow, and super sensitive, we are led to the conclusion that this was the image that the other Lutheran bodies had of her. To be sure, there were examples of name-calling on all sides, and even a non-Missourian like Wentz said:

⁶⁴Wentz, History of Lutheranism, p. 340.

It is certain also that the faith of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, as set forth in the course of these debates, is definite and steadfast. The sole purpose has been to maintain scriptural positions, to deny to man any part whatsoever in his own salvation or his own conversion, to exalt above all else the grace of God in Jesus Christ, and to give God alone the glory. At the same time there has been conscientious effort to avoid fellowship with those, even of the same name, who seem to deviate from correct Scriptural positions as interpreted by Missouri. Whatever may be argued about the correctness of Missouri's doctrinal and confessional positions, it cannot be denied that her deep convictions and faithful persistence have helped to produce a volume of Christian enterprise that constitutes a fine record for Lutheranism in America.⁶⁵

But the Missouri Synod still carried the germ of Stephanism; she was totally right, and the others were totally wrong.

Professor Stoeckhardt of the Missouri Synod wrote in 1904:

Everything today which is called Protestant or Evangelical or Lutheran, wherever it may be throughout the world, with the exception of our Synodical Conference and its allies, it is one cake, one great broth, yea, one doctrinal cauldron. For the doctrinal errors on account of which we make war upon our 'Lutheran' opponents in this Country are part of the world's religion which would have men to be saved by their own works. Upon the one hand, therefore, the large throng of those who deny Christ closely related to the kingdom of the Anti-Christ. Upon the other hand, the Church of the pure Word and sacraments which, at the present time, is confined to the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America and the ecclesiastical bodies in unity of faith with it.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 209ff.

⁶⁶ G. St[oeckhardt], "Die Gegenwärtige Gestalt der protestantischen Kirche," Der Lutheraner, 60 (July 19, 1904), 227, translated in Meuser, Formation, p. 114, n. 8.

So while the other Lutheran churches might agree with Walther that the Lutheran church was the true visible church on earth, by the beginning of the twentieth century, spokesmen of the Missouri Synod were stating that only the Synodical Conference had a right to the name of Lutheran, which sounded much like the earlier "Stephanism." This caused it to have a fear of change, lest that change might be a compromise, or worse, an admission of past errors. Theodore Graebner wrote in 1948:

The idea is that we are not only without flaw or error in all our past applications of Holy Writ--we shall even regard ourselves in duty-bound to pass the same judgments no matter what the change may be in the situation . . . How far back does this attitude go and what are the underlying causes? Why does an organization which like no other stresses the absolute authority of the inspired Word stand not only in awe but in abject fear of its own pronouncements of the past? What is it that makes us set a resolute face against any acknowledgment of change not only in our own selves but even in the opponent? There should have been an end of the election controversy when Ohio adopted the formula that God shows those to be His children whom he foreknew in view of the merits of Christ accepted by faith. In other words intuitus of the merits of Christ not an intuitus of faith. Why did we not acclaim with joy the restoration of sound evangelical truth on this point?⁶⁷

With this attitude, it is no wonder that the other synods not only felt hostility towards the Missouri Synod, but also

⁶⁷Theodore Graebner, "The Burden of Infallibility. A Study in the History of Dogma," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XXXVIII (July, 1965), Although this was written in 1948, it was not published until 1965.

went their own way for decades after the predestinarian controversy. Official meetings for the purpose of investigating possible fellowship between the Iowa and Ohio Synods were held as early as 1883 in Richmond, Indiana. At this time Gottfried Fritschel of Iowa prepared the Richmond Theses covering the doctrines at issue between the Iowa and Missouri synods. Significantly, Fritschel admitted the validity of the "insistence on the essential invisibility of the church"⁶⁸ held by the Missouri Synod and rejected the hierarchical approach to church government that it had felt was implicit in the doctrine of the church and ministry held by the Iowa Synod. He also condemned "All unionism which ignores the importance of unity of faith [referring to the General Synod and the General Council] and all ultraconservatism which elevates mere human opinion to the articles of faith" [referring to the Synodical Conference].⁶⁹ This meeting and these theses were important, but nothing came of them because there was still tension between the two bodies, both because of personalities, and because the Ohio Synod would not completely agree with the approach of the Iowa Synod to doctrine. The Ohio Synod was happy to have the Iowa Synod on its side against the Missouri Synod, but made it clear that did not mean all other matters of difference were resolved.

⁶⁸Meuser, Formation, p. 74. ⁶⁹Ibid., p. 75.

Then the Ohio Synod invited the Iowa Synod in 1886 to a colloquy, but because of the personality clashes, nothing happened until 1893, when representatives of the two synods met in Michigan City, Indiana. The Iowa Synod was indeed ready for fellowship without discussion, consistent with its approach to the confessions and open questions. The Ohio Synod prepared theses covering the same topics as the Richmond Theses had covered as an Ohioan answer to them. Both sides were anxious to see whether their worst fears regarding the other were true or not. The Ohio Synod wanted to see whether the Iowa Synod indeed had a lax standard of doctrine because of its stand on open questions; the Iowa Synod wanted to see whether the Ohio Synod was just another Missouri Synod in disguise, insisting on doctrinal formulations the Iowa Synod felt were not binding. What was revealed was a closer agreement than all had thought, but it also showed a difference in the basic approach to doctrine by the two synods. Fred Meuser said that the Ohio Synod had a more "theological" approach to doctrine than the Iowa Synod, meaning that it was "more conscious of a systematic theology, an inter-related whole of doctrine."⁷⁰ Fellowship between the two synods was frustrated as much as anything by factions in both synods which were still concerned about the

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 93.

old Iowa-Missouri conflicts. But there was enough sentiment for fellowship in both groups so that another meeting was held in Toledo in 1907. The results of this meeting, "The Toledo Theses," were finally officially adopted by the Iowa Synod, which also then declared fellowship with the Ohio Synod. The Ohio Synod, however, while it accepted the theses, did not vote fellowship because of membership of the Iowa Synod in the General Council, to which the Ohio Synod objected because of the "Four Points."⁷¹

A study of the Toledo Theses shows that there was a certain give and take on both sides. The Iowa Synod conceded that the church is essentially invisible and that the congregation has the authority to administer the means of grace, and commissions ministers to do this. The Ohio Synod, on the other hand, acknowledged that the means of grace are the visible marks of the church's existence and changed the wording in the section on the ministry to alleviate Iowa's fears of a transfer theory of the ministry such as the Missouri Synod held.⁷² The Iowa Synod said that all doctrines "clearly and plainly revealed in the word of God" are binding, whether defined in the confessions or not,⁷³ while the Ohio

⁷¹C. C. Hein became a leader in this way of thinking, although later he would also be the leader in union efforts. Although there were several other meetings and sets of theses, the Toledo Theses formed the basis for the eventual church fellowship between the Ohio and Iowa Synods.

⁷²Meuser, Formation, p. 118.

⁷³Wolf, Documents, p. 217.

Synod agreed that "a binding subscription to the confessions pertained only to the doctrines of the faith therein set forth" and acknowledged the difference between agreement on articles of faith on which complete agreement was necessary for church fellowship, and non-fundamental doctrines, on which no complete agreement is expected. The emphases on chiliasm and on Sunday were no longer pressed by the Iowa Synod.⁷⁴ The section on predestination and conversion was of course mainly a restatement of the Synods' position over against Missouri. It maintained that the universal grace of God and the special elective grace were to be kept together, that conversion is solely the work of God, but that God does not work conversion arbitrarily or coercively.⁷⁵

The Ohio and Iowa Synods were moving steadily closer to each other. In many places there was altar and pulpit fellowship before this became official synod policy.⁷⁶ The only thing that really held up official fellowship action was affiliation with the General Council by the Iowa Synod. But when the General Council entered into a merger in 1918

⁷⁴Meuser, Formation, p. 119. He suggests that one reason for this omission was that those who had suggested them were dead or retired. Sigmund Fritschel and Deindorfer are specifically mentioned.

⁷⁵Wolf, Documents, pp. 216-219.

⁷⁶Meuser, Formation, p. 134, mentions the situation in Texas, where pastors from the Ohio and Iowa synods had cordial relations even before the Toledo Theses in 1907.

with the General Synod and the United Synod of the South to form the United Lutheran Church in America, the Iowa Synod withdrew from the General Council. When this happened, there was no longer any reason to delay fellowship, and in 1918 mutual altar and pulpit fellowship was officially announced between the Ohio and Iowa synods.

Missouri's Isolation

Now the Missouri Synod was truly isolated. The predestinarian controversy had left the Synodical conference in a shambles. The Ohio Synod and the Norwegian had withdrawn, and both were publicly accusing the Missouri Synod of false doctrine. How did the Missouri Synod react? The issue was debated, not only in all of the theological journals but also in free conferences. The first significant one in this era was held in April, 1903, with men from the Iowa, Ohio, Missouri and Wisconsin synods. It discussed an essay by Francis Pieper of St. Louis on the doctrines of election and conversion. He seemed to have tried to reconcile the opposing side, so much so that the General Synod journal, The Lutheran, suggested even that he was changing Missouri's position, a charge which he denied.⁷⁷

A second, larger conference was held in September, 1903. This time the discussion centered around the relationship of

⁷⁷ Carl S. Meyer, "The Historical Background of 'A Brief Statement' (concluded)," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXII (September, 1961), 527, n. 124.

God's universal grace to His elective grace, and the principles of Biblical interpretation as related to the passages on conversion and election. This was followed by a third conference in April, 1904 on the analogy of faith. This phrase meant that a difficult passage in the Bible was to be interpreted in a way consistent with clear passages. This in general was agreed to by all, but the Missouri Synod insisted that the passages on predestination were clear passages, although they revealed an impenetrable mystery, and therefore a doctrinal statement based on these passages was possible. The Ohio and Iowa synod men insisted that these passages were unclear, and so had to be interpreted in light of the passages about universal grace. It was obvious that the positions were hardening. Finally in August, 1905 the fourth and last free conference of this series was held. It ended not only in disagreement, but also in hostility. So much so that Professor Frederick Dente of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, was led to say that since the participants were defending partisan positions, joint prayer at the conference was not possible, because the participants would be praying against each other.⁷⁸ When

⁷⁸Theodore Graebner, Prayer Fellowship, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), p. 23; Graebner, "The Burden of Infallibility," p. 91; Theodore Graebner, "The Cloak of the Cleric," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XLIV (February, 1971), p. 4.

the Missouri Synod was accused of causing disunity by insisting on its own way,⁷⁹ it accused the Ohio and Iowa synods of weakening the sola gratia in man's salvation.⁸⁰ The net result was that these two synods were led to closer ties with each other, and the Synodical Conference, at least officially, did not participate in any other interdenominational activity again until 1917.⁸¹

The Norwegian Merger

The Norwegian Lutherans, although a smaller group than the Germans, also played an influential role, not only in the predestinarian controversy, but in subsequent events. The Anti-Missourian Brotherhood had established relations with the other Norwegian groups and in 1890 had formed the United Norwegian Church. The two groups not in this new merger were the pietistic, low-church Hauge Synod and the conservative, more high-church Norwegian Synod, which was the Norwegian Church closest to the Missouri Synod in its doctrine. The United Church continued its attempts to establish a single Norwegian body. Between 1906 and 1912, a number of Union statements were worked out in committee discussions. The United Church acted as a mediator between

⁷⁹Meuser, Formation, p. 115; Meyer, "Background of 'A Brief Statement,'" p. 528.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Meuser, Formation, pp. 49ff, mentions the attempt by the pastors of the Iowa, Missouri and Ohio synods in the St. Paul area in 1915.

the Hauge and the Norwegian synods. This meant that there were compromises in these agreements. When the major obstacle regarding the ministry of laymen in the church was removed (the Hauge Synod emphasized the work of the laymen), there remained only the difficult question of election, which had caused the Anti-Missourian break in the first place. This was finally resolved by adopting two separate "forms of doctrine". They were mutually exclusive, but for the sake of a merger, they both were recognized as acceptable.

This statement on election was adopted in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1912. It became known as the Madison Agreement, or in Norwegian, Opgjøer. In the conservative circles the Opgjøer became the epitome of unionistic compromises. It acknowledged the statements in the Formula of Concord as sufficient for fellowship. But it allowed two interpretations. The first form taught an election "unto salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."⁸² This was basically what Missouri had said. The second form used the formulation of John Pontoppidan, a Norwegian Pietist of the eighteenth century who was a favorite of Hans Hauge, after whom the Hauge Synod was named. It said, "God has appointed all those to eternal life who He from eternity had foreseen would accept the offered grace, believe in Christ and remain

⁸²Wolf, Documents, p. 233.

constant in this faith unto the end.⁸³ Both union committees accepted both forms of doctrine "unreservedly," and no "new and more elaborate theses" were regarded as necessary for church unity.⁸⁴ Those involved freely admitted this article was a compromise, so that church unity could be achieved "because of our common Christian faith and our common blood compelled it."⁸⁵

Thus this union was finally established in 1917 not only on the basis of doctrinal agreement, but because the Norwegians wanted to be one church body. Since the past history of the Lutherans in Norway had less doctrinal controversy than the Lutherans in Germany, it would be understandable if in America these Norwegian Lutherans approached church fellowship in a different way from that of the German Lutherans. But this did not please the Synodical Conference. Not only did it denounce the Opgjoer, but in 1917 a small dissenting group refused to join in this merger, even after a conciliatory statement, the Austin Agreement, was adopted. It formed a separate body known as the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (later known as the Evangelical Lutheran

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 232f.

⁸⁵Theodore Graebner, The Problem of Lutheran Union and Other Essays, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1935), p. 68.

Synod) and joined the Synodical Conference in 1920.⁸⁶ This small body was understandably opposed to anything that had the slightest hint of Unionism, and this added to the animus against the Norwegian Synod in the Synodical Conference.

The Age of Larger Units

This title is borrowed from Wentz to designate the period beginning in 1910. It is an apt phrase, for the ecumenical movement was flourishing in Protestantism, and American Lutheranism was no exception. The optimism of the social gospel was permeating the churches. In 1908 the Federal Council of Churches was formed as a climax to all of the various interdenominational organizations within American Protestantism. The Lutherans were finding their own reasons for cooperation. 1917 was the 400th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, and various plans were being made in anticipation of that event. President C. H. L. Schuette of the Ohio Synod called for free conferences in 1912 to prepare for this anniversary. This led him to try to establish a federation of Lutheran churches in 1914, but nothing concrete came of it.⁸⁷ However, a number of free conferences were held from 1914 to 1917.

⁸⁶Wiederaenders and Tillmanns, Synods, p. 58.

⁸⁷It was one more step however, in cementing relations between the Iowa and Ohio Synods leading to the establishment of pulpit and altar fellowship in 1918. Meuser, Formation, p. 141.

During this time, Francis Pieper of the Missouri Synod went so far as to say that a reconciliation between the Missouri, Ohio and Iowa Synods "ought to be easy if only the latter would acknowledge that nothing in man is responsible for his conversion."⁸⁸ This was something that the Toledo Theses seemingly had already said.⁸⁹

The years 1917 to 1919 were amazingly productive of cooperative activity. The 400th anniversary celebrations brought Lutherans of various types together in close cooperation. One of the best examples of this is what happened in New York. A number of Lutheran laymen and two Missouri Synod pastors, William Schoenfield and O. W. Pannkoke, were instrumental in founding a Lutheran Publicity Bureau that was designed to be a permanent public relations agency for Lutheranism.⁹⁰ Meanwhile, the war had created special problems for the Lutherans. There had been widespread instances of anti-German hysteria which needed joint action. Furthermore, the churches realized that they had an obligation to their young men in the service, and in 1917 the Lutheran Commission for Soldiers' and Sailors' Welfare was formed. All the Lutheran bodies except the Synodical Conference joined, and the Synodical Conference organized

⁸⁸ Meyer, "Background of 'A Brief Statement,'" p. 531.

⁸⁹ Wolf, Documents, pp. 218f.

⁹⁰ Frederick K. Wentz, "Beginnings of the National Lutheran Council," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XL (Oct., 1967), 134.

its own Army and Navy Board, which cooperated with the other group in various ways. After the war, this temporary commission was continued and in effect merged with the Lutheran Bureau, so that on September 6, 1918, the National Lutheran Council was formed. Its purposes were to promote uniform statistical information among the Lutheran churches, to coordinate publicity that affected all the bodies, to act as a representative to all outside agencies, including the government, to deal with the emergencies arising out of the war, and to coordinate welfare activities.⁹¹ Again the Synodical Conference was not represented, although several Missouri pastors had been active in the organization of the National Lutheran Council.

At the same time that these cooperative activities were beginning, several important church mergers were taking place. The Norwegians merged in 1917. In 1918, after only a short negotiation, the General Synod, the General Council, and the United Synod of the South merged into the United Lutheran Church in America, which involved forty-five constituent synods. This was a reunion of the "Muhlenberg Line" of American Lutheranism. The United Synod of the South was the result of the split during the Civil War, and the General Council was the result of the controversy in 1866.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 140f.

During the separation, there had been a marked drift to a more confessional Lutheranism, although still to the left of the other Lutheran bodies. So the confessional basis for the new church looked solid enough on the surface, but the other Lutherans pointed out two flaws. (1) Although the unaltered Augsburg Confession was mentioned as "a correct exhibition of the faith and doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church,"⁹² it recognized the rest of the Book of Concord "as in the harmony of one and the same Scriptural faith,"⁹³ a statement too weak for the other Lutherans. (2) The individual synods retained the right of discipline. This meant that the more liberal synods within the United Lutheran Church would be free to continue their doctrinal positions, and the more conservative members of the merger could do nothing to change this situation. As a result, the United Lutheran Church consistently resisted attempts to establish doctrinal agreement with other church bodies. It wanted Lutheran union, but it said that these discussions were not necessary for union as long as the other church bodies acknowledged the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. More basic than that, there was relatively little doctrinal agreement within its own church body, and so it preferred to allow a variety of doctrinal postures.

⁹²Wolf, Documents, p. 273.

⁹³Ibid.

Another development around 1917 that was to have a profound effect on inter-synodical relations was that the laymen in the churches were finding a voice. The Lutheran Churches were beginning to feel the influence of the laymen. Other Protestant churches had experienced this decades before, but there had been no significant Lutheran lay leaders to compare with the Dodges, the Tappans, the Rockefellers or Andrew Carnegie who had been influential in lay activity. Laymen had been active in the 400th anniversary celebrations in 1917 and had played an important role in the Lutheran Bureau, the National Lutheran Commission on Soldiers' and Sailors' Welfare, the National Lutheran Council, and in various voluntary organizations that drew from all synods. 1917 was also the year when the laymen began to organize. Laymen from the churches participating in the National Lutheran Commission founded the Lutheran Brotherhood in November to help the commission. After the war, it continued in operation, not only attempting to stimulate lay leadership, but also to improve inter-synodical relations.⁹⁴ Meanwhile, a group of wealthy laymen in the Missouri Synod decided at a meeting during the Synodical Convention in June to do something about the \$100,000 synodical debt. These laymen were all successful business men, and they put

⁹⁴Wentz, History of Lutheranism, p. 293.

their talents to work to rescue the synod at a time when the war had caused a decrease in contributions. The ten men at this meeting pledged \$26,000 among themselves and then agreed to solicit funds from others in the synod for the balance. Their success in this venture prompted them to establish a permanent organization, known as the Lutheran Laymen's League. For some time it concerned itself mainly with helping with the financial problems of the Missouri Synod, but nevertheless it was instrumental in involving laymen in the work of the church.⁹⁵

The Missouri Synod was coming out of its isolation. In 1911 it had accepted the English Synod of Missouri as a non-geographical district. This group was to provide much impetus and many leaders for subsequent inter-synodical activities. In the difficult days of Anti-German feeling at the time of the war, the English District showed the way for the Missouri Synod to be integrated within the American culture. It supplied the English periodical for the church body, The Lutheran Witness. It introduced the "English Common Service" of the Muhlenberg group into the Missouri Synod, which was adopted as the basic liturgy in the Synodical Conference hymnal published in 1941. Finally, the Missouri Synod established its first

⁹⁵Baepler, A Century of Grace, p. 251; W. G. Polack, "The Founding of the Lutheran Laymen's League and the First Years of its Activity," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, VI (April, 1933), 1ff.

inter-synodical committee in 1917 to meet with committees from the other Lutheran churches.⁹⁶

The Period of Inter-Synodical Agreements

Thus the years from 1917 to 1919 were packed with events connected with inter-Lutheran fellowship and cooperation. The Lutheran Brotherhood, the Lutheran Laymen's League, the National Lutheran Commission on Soldiers' and Sailors' Welfare, and the Missouri Synod Inter-Synodical committee were all organized in 1917. In addition, Lutheran groups cooperated to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Reformation. Finally, the Norwegians accomplished their merger. In 1918 the National Lutheran Council organized, the Ohio and Iowa synods established pulpit and altar fellowship, and the General Synod, the General Council, and the United Synod of the South merged, to become the United Lutheran Church in America. In 1919, the Wisconsin Synod merged with the Minnesota and Michigan Synods and the Iowa and Buffalo Synods established doctrinal agreement. All was ready for the next round of talks toward closer relations.

So in 1919, representatives from all the churches in the National Lutheran Council met in Chicago. The result

⁹⁶Meyer, "Background of 'A Brief Statement,'" pp. 531f. For a discussion of the origins of this committee, see August Suelflow, "Church Polity and Fellowship in American Lutheranism," The Springfielder, XXVIII (Spring, 1964), 14.

was the Chicago Theses, which dealt with questions of soteriology and Christology (including articles on conversion and election). These Theses were not adopted officially at that time by the church bodies, but were included in the Minneapolis Theses of 1925, which were used in the formation of the American Lutheran Church and were adopted by the churches that formed the American Lutheran Conference in 1930.

These Minneapolis Theses came as the result of merger negotiations between the synods of Ohio, Iowa, Buffalo, and the Norwegian Lutheran Church. In order to demonstrate to the Missouri Synod that the Norwegian body was not as unionistic as it had been labeled, C. C. Hein of the Ohio Synod presented a section on conversion and election much more detailed and much more to the liking of the Missouri Synod than the articles in the Chicago Theses.⁹⁷ But the Norwegians refused to accept them, finally endorsing instead the Chicago Theses of 1919 on conversion and election as part of a basis for agreement among the four church bodies.

While this was going on, the Missouri and Wisconsin synods were having their inter-synodical committees meeting with committees from the Buffalo, Iowa and Ohio synods. These discussions had their origins in St. Paul,

⁹⁷Meuser, Formation, p. 239.

Minnesota in 1915. At that time, pastors from the various synods had met to discuss doctrinal issues and had purposely excluded theological professors from the discussions to lessen controversy. They found to their surprise that there was general agreement on all controverted points. This gave impetus to the establishment of the official Missouri Synod Inter-Synodical committee in 1917. Progress in these official discussions was also steady and heartening. Theodore Graebner, a member of the committee from 1923 to 1926, wrote, "Neither I nor our Wisconsin Synod representatives ever had to convince or convert the men from Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo synods; when we understood each other, we found that we were agreed."⁹⁸ So near unanimous agreement among the members of the committee was achieved in 1925.⁹⁹

But there were objections to the resultant Theses from within the Synodical Conference. Already at the 1923 Missouri Synod Convention an Examining Committee was appointed, made up of three professors from their more conservative seminary at Springfield, Ill. It made a number of suggested changes, which were to some extent incorporated into the final draft. The changes, however,

⁹⁸[Theodore Graebner], "Prospects of Lutheran Union," The Atlantic Bulletin, 46 (May, 1946), 70.

⁹⁹Meuser, Formation, pp. 250f. and p. 251, n. 94. Here he explains that two Ohio Synod members objected to the rejection of "Intuitu fidei" and submitted a "Separate Declaration" as a minority report.

did not allay the fears of the conservative wing of the Synodical Conference, which included the Examining Committee. Despite the fact that many leaders and historians reflecting various viewpoints assessed the Intersynodical Theses (as they were known) to be a victory for the Missourian point of view, the conservatives feared trickery on the part of their "opponents," or naivete or a sell-out on the part of the Missouri Synod committee members.¹⁰⁰ This fear was fortified when Dr. Lenski of the Ohio Synod wrote a series of articles in 1923 which "stoutly maintain the old Ohioan position on election."¹⁰¹ Because of this and other similar statements, the opponents of the Theses doubted the sincerity of the non-Missouri Synod committee members.

The most vehement opposition inside the Missouri Synod to the Theses came from Iowa and northern Illinois. Two pastors, Theodore Hanssen and John Buenger, led the fight. Hanssen was on the Convention Committee in 1929 which recommended rejection of the Theses. He wrote The Historical Open Questions Among American Lutherans, and campaigned vigorously against

¹⁰⁰J. L. Neve, History of the Lutheran Church in America, (Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1935), p. 218 & 241; Meuser, Formation, pp. 250f; Graebner, The Problem of Lutheran Union, p. 83; Letter, Theodore Graebner to Henry Boettcher, Nov. 6, 1939, Concordia Historical INstitute, Graebner file.

¹⁰¹Graebner, The Problem of Lutheran Union, p. 83.

the 1938 St. Louis Resolutions. D. H. Pannkoke had him in mind when he wrote about the 1929 rejection of the Theses: "For thirteen years a committee had weighed words and scrutinized them a million times and finally come to agreement. The agitation of a rural pastor prevented that union."¹⁰²

Over and over again in his Open Questions essay he attacked the Theses for their ambiguity and omissions, even calling the Theses "Deceitful," and impugning the integrity or intelligence of the committee members.¹⁰³

John Buenger wrote The Confession of the Missouri Synod and the Desired Unity of the Lutheran Church in 1935, which was a defense of the "Brief Statement." He compared the "Brief Statement" to the position of the old Iowa Synod. In 1940 he wrote a series of articles for the ultra-conservative Confessional Lutheran on "The Dogmatic-Historical Background of the Present Union Movement" in which he stated,

Now, in order to get at the root of our differences, it is necessary to go back to the main cause and beginning of the present confusion--the union movement of twenty years ago, which culminated in the Chicago Theses. [another name for the Intersynodical Theses.]¹⁰⁴

¹⁰²D. H. Pannkoke, "The Need and Outlook for Lutheran Unity," The Lutheran Standard, XCI (Oct., 13, 1934), 5.

¹⁰³Theodore Hansses, The Historical Open Questions Among American Lutherans, (Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1936), pp. 9, 22, 32, 43, 95, *passim*.

¹⁰⁴John Buenger, "The Dogmatic-Historical Background of the Present Union Movement," The Confessional Lutheran, I (June, 1940), 37.

By this he implied that the wording of the Theses was such that the other synods were able deceitfully to hide their old "erroneous" doctrines behind phrases that were "almost universally understood in our sense within the Synodical Conference and in the sense of our opponents [n.b.] throughout the length and breadth of the Iowa and Ohio Synods."¹⁰⁵

These sentiments were shared by many within the Missouri Synod and were found outside the Missouri Synod especially in the Norwegian Lutheran Synod. Its fear of unionism involving its former colleagues of the Norwegian Lutheran Church was almost paranoid. Because the German Synods were discussing affiliation with the Norwegian Lutheran Church in what would be the American Lutheran Conference, this little Norwegian group which had split off at the time of the Madison Agreement and joined the Synodical Conference felt that any contact between the Missouri Synod and the Iowa or Ohio Synods must take the "unionism" of the larger Norwegian group into consideration. And indeed, there were many, also on the Missouri Synod Committee, who questioned the close contacts between these German groups and the other, less conservative, Scandinavian groups. President Hein of the Ohio Synod was questioned by Theodore Graebner at the suggestion of the Inter-synodical Committee just on

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

this subject of cooperation in the National Lutheran Council and other intersynodical activities, and about the work on a federation between the German and Scandinavian synods. The Missouri Synod felt these activities were unionistic, and according to Graebner, Hein agreed to some extent, justifying the participation of the Ohio Synod by the circumstances involved.¹⁰⁶ This led Graebner and the Missouri Synod committee to conclude that despite the agreement in doctrines with the other synods, there was a distinct difference in what each synod believed about church fellowship.¹⁰⁷

The Inter-Synodical Committee made its final report to the Missouri Synod in 1929. In presenting the Theses to the convention, the committee made a point that even if the convention would approve them, the question of establishing fraternal relations with the other synods was a separate matter, complicated "by the connections into which, sad to say, these synods have entered and the fraternal relations which they maintain with Lutherans who are not faithful in the confessions."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶Letter, Theodore Graebner to Wm. Arndt, Sept. 7, 1925, Concordia Historical Institute, Graebner file; Letter, Theodore Graebner to Theodore Engelder, Nov. 27, 1925, Concordia Historical Institute, Graebner file.

¹⁰⁷The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and other States. Proceedings of the Thirty-Third Regular Convention, (St. Louis, 1926), p. 136.

¹⁰⁸The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States. Proceedings of the Thirty-Fourth Regular Convention, (River Forest, Ill., 1929), p. 110.

The Examining Committee appointed in 1923 also made its report, and the difference in tone between it and the Inter-Synodical committee's report was very noticeable. It echoed the sentiments of Hanssen and Buenger. It accused the committee of not taking its suggested changes seriously enough. It mainly accused the Theses of omitting important statements that the Examining Committee felt would safeguard against the old errors of the "opponents." It said, "All chapters and a number of paragraphs are inadequate."¹⁰⁹ So it recommended that the Theses be rejected and all further conferences be discontinued, since by establishing closer relations with the Norwegians, the other synods "have given evidence that they do not hold our position in the doctrines of conversion and election."¹¹⁰ In essence, it said that in order for the Theses to be acceptable, the other synods must clearly show that they acknowledge that they were wrong and the Missouri Synod was right. Whereas the Inter-Synodical Committee had come to trust the statements of the men from the other synods through their discussion of the issues, the Examining Committee based their judgment on the earlier controversies and so concluded that the committees did not mean what the Theses said and were hiding error.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 112.

Despite the fact that the Convention committee softened the Examining Committee's report, and made a special point of criticizing "every suspicion concerning the personal position of the colloquents in faith and doctrine, inclusive of any accusation of impure motives of any kind,"¹¹¹ it still recommended rejection of the Theses, a discontinuation of the present negotiations, and establishment of a new committee to formulate theses which would more completely deal with the old controversies between the Missouri Synod and the other synods. Furthermore, it recommended that the Missouri Synod stand ready to begin new discussions, provided "that the move toward fellowship between the Ohio and Iowa synods, . . . and the Norwegian Lutheran Church, . . . be first adjusted according to the Word of God."¹¹² These recommendations were adopted.

Why did the Missouri Synod reject the Intersynodical Theses after so many years of diligent committee work. The Theses seemed to be a victory for it, especially since they repudiated specifically the term "Intuitu fidei" which had caused all the trouble in the Predestinarian Controversy. Even though the conservatives in the Synodical Conference found fault with the Theses, Graebner insisted that the reason for the rejection "was not in the Theses"

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 113.

but lay outside them."¹¹³ The rejection certainly endangered hopes for future reconciliation among the German synods. The other synods felt frustrated and cheated because they had worked so hard to please the Missouri Synod and had high hopes after the committees agreed, only to have all this go for aught. C. C. Hein in his address to the American Lutheran Church convention in 1934,¹¹⁴ and in numerous letters expressed his feelings of frustration and anger toward the Missouri Synod, especially toward the spirit of the Examining Committee and its reports.¹¹⁵ He felt disgusted with some of the leaders of the Missouri Synod and felt that there was no point in having further discussions.¹¹⁶

With all this in mind, the reasons for the rejection come into focus. Meuser said,

The imminent formation of the American Lutheran Conference and the fellowship of Ohio, Iowa and Buffalo with the Norwegians were obviously the major reasons for Missouri's action.¹¹⁷

¹¹³[Theodore] G[raebner], "The Union Theses of 1929," The Lutheran Witness, LVII (June 14, 1938), 200.

¹¹⁴The American Lutheran Church. Official Minutes of the Third Convention, (Waverly, Iowa, 1934), p. 25.

¹¹⁵Letter, C. C. Hein to Paul E. Kretzmann, Feb. 22, 1933, Archives of the American Lutheran Church, Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, Missouri Synod file; Letter, C. C. Hein to Theodore Graebner, Feb. 16, 1934, Hein file.

¹¹⁶D. H. Pannkoke, A Great Church--Finds Itself, (Quitman, Ga.: by the author, 1966), pp. 236f.

¹¹⁷Meuser, Formation, p. 252.

Henry Boettcher, a pastor of the Wisconsin Synod who had been involved in the intersynodical conferences in Minnesota from the start, agreed with this,¹¹⁸ but also said that Dr. F. Pieper was also largely responsible for the convention action. In fact, he said, "Pieper is gone and I believe the main stumbling block is removed. Dr. Walther, St. Paul, told us, that Pieper gave the committee the ultimatum. "You can choose between adoption or me. If you adopt, I must fight you."¹¹⁹ Then too, the innuendos against the conservatives and the Norwegian Lutheran Synod had their effect. Enough of the convention felt that there might be some truth to these things, and they were afraid to be called unionistic and lose the fellowship of the rest of the Synodical Conference. Finally the difference in attitude toward fellowship was a decisive factor. The Ohio and Iowa synods could see nothing wrong in negotiating with both the Missouri Synod and the Scandinavians on the basis of two different documents. The Missouri Synod felt that this was hypocritical and unionistic.

¹¹⁸Letter, Henry Boettcher to C. C. Hein, Dec. 11, 1933, Archives of the American Lutheran Church, Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, Missouri Synod file.

¹¹⁹Letter, Henry Boettcher to C. C. Hein, Jan 23, 1934, Archives of the American Lutheran Church, Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, Missouri Synod file.

So the synods of Buffalo, Ohio, and Iowa had a choice. Either they could attempt to achieve a union with the Norwegians and incur the wrath of the Synodical Conference, or they could concentrate on working with the Missouri Synod. They had tried to do both, but when it became apparent that they could not satisfy the Missouri Synod, they forged ahead with their fellowship efforts which ended in the formation in 1930 of the American Lutheran Church and the American Lutheran Conference. So Meuser explained the difference between the German Synods by saying that it "was not doctrinal; Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo simply had a different type of spirit that was willing to be more generous in its evaluation of synods which expressed their doctrines in different phraseology."¹²⁰ The result was that the Missouri Synod action in 1929 led the other synods to move more toward the "left," while the Missouri Synod took a definite step toward the "right" of the Lutheran spectrum.

¹²⁰ Meuser, Formation, p. 241

PART II
CHAPTER I

THE WRITTEN WORD SETS THE STAGE FOR RENEWED
NEGOTIATIONS 1931-1935

With the rejection of the Intersynodical Theses in 1929 by the Missouri Synod which ended its official negotiations with the other German midwestern Synods, and with the formation of the American Lutheran Church and the American Lutheran Conference in 1930, a new period began for American Lutheranism. Instead of a number of smaller groups, there were, for all practical purposes, only three major Lutheran groups in 1930. The United Lutheran Church in America was on the theological left, the Synodical Conference was on the right, and the American Lutheran Conference occupied a central, mediating position.¹

These three groups did not discuss church fellowship and Lutheran unity officially until 1936, but from 1931 to 1935 their representatives wrote a large number of articles and essays on these subjects. These statements clearly

¹G. A. Fandrey, "Die Amerikanisch-Lutherische Konferenz," Kirchenblatt, 73 (March 15, 1930), 83; R. M[almin], "Prospects of New Union Movements," Lutheran Church Herald, XIV (Sept. 9, 1930), 1269; [Theodore] G[raebner], "The American Lutheran Conference," The Lutheran Witness, XLXIX (Dec. 9, 1930), 420.

showed the divergent positions of the Lutheran bodies on how church unity could be achieved.² This divergence would prove to be the major stumbling block to union. But the Lutherans in America were concerned about closer church relations, and the number and scope of these articles and essays were symptoms of this interest. They also stimulated a widespread discussion which prepared the way for the official negotiations that would begin in 1936.

The United Lutheran Church

The position of the United Lutheran Church had been clearly enunciated in the Washington Declaration of 1920. After rejecting the principles of the Interchurch World Movement which was encouraging a merger of Protestant churches, and after limiting its cooperation with non-Lutheran churches to specific situations, it said:

In the case of those church bodies calling themselves Evangelical Lutheran, and subscribing the Confessions which have always been regarded as the standards of Evangelical Lutheran doctrine, the United Lutheran Church in America recognizes no doctrinal reasons against complete co-operation and organic union with such bodies.³

²For a fuller treatment of the three basic approaches to Lutheran unity, see John Tietjen, Which Way to Lutheran Unity?, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966).

³Wolf, Documents, p. 350. Nathan Melhorn, the editor of The Lutheran stated that this Washington Declaration was written as an answer to the Interchurch World Movement, "Unionism," The Lutheran Church Quarterly, VI (Jan., 1933), 49.

This position was frequently reiterated during the years 1931 to 1935. For example, F. H. Knubel said: "The United Lutheran Church in America desires first of all the consolidation of the Lutheran Church in America."⁴ He insisted that no "small tests of Lutheranism" such as agreement on predestination, lodge membership, and unionism should be used as a condition for this consolidation. Since the United Lutheran Church did not feel that even doctrinal discussions were necessary for unity, this was a different approach to the problem than most other American Lutheran churches took. There was editorial encouragement for all phases of the Lutheran union movement, but its position was that all requirements for Lutheran unity already existed. It felt that all that was needed was the affirmation of this already-existing unity. So there was less need for journalistic activity in the United Lutheran Church than in the other churches.

However, even in this church body, there was a concern about "unionism," or improper religious activity between representatives of different denominations. Although it was the most "liberal" of the Lutheran groups, even it had no alliances with non-Lutheran churches.⁵

⁴Frederick Knubel, "Lutheranism and the United Lutheran Church" The Lutheran, XV (June 8, 1933), 23.

⁵Melhorn, "Unionism," p. 47.

But there was less concern about this issue than in the other Lutheran groups, and so its journals had less to say about it.

The American Lutheran Conference

The situation in the American Lutheran Conference and the Synodical Conference was different. The churches that belonged to these groups insisted, in varying degrees, on doctrinal agreement in addition to Confessional subscription before church fellowship. Therefore, church unity was not something already taken for granted, and these churches still had to seek ways to achieve agreement and fellowship.

The Norwegian Lutheran Church

In the American Lutheran Conference, representatives of the Norwegian Lutheran Church took the lead in urging stronger efforts toward the goal of Lutheran unity. They had a different attitude toward fellowship than the German Lutherans did. They did not have the history of doctrinal controversies settled by detailed doctrinal statements, as the Germans did. Furthermore, they had had a long history of cooperating in inter-Lutheran activities. So although a large segment of this church was doctrinally conservative and thus close to the German synods in this respect, it was also more inclined to inter-church cooperation than the Germans were.

Though practically related to the ULCA in the work of the National Lutheran Council, they were ideologically and sociologically akin to the Missouri Synod.⁶

The Norwegians were in sympathy with the American Lutheran Church in excluding the United Lutheran Church from the American Lutheran Conference, for fear the United Lutheran Church would introduce a dangerous liberal theology into this conservative, midwestern federation. Indeed, the American Lutheran Conference was looked upon as an alternative to the National Lutheran Council, which included the United Lutheran Church.⁷ So even though the Norwegians accepted fellowship with the other synods in the Conference after only a minimum of discussion (the Minneapolis Theses were drafted at a one-day colloquy in 1926), it still could not accept the approach of the United Lutheran Church about fellowship, which required no doctrinal statement at all beyond the Confessions. The Norwegians, along with most of the other Lutheran bodies in the American Lutheran Conference and the Synodical Conference, were suspicious about the orthodoxy of the United Lutheran Church.

The Norwegian writers in the early 1930's analyzed the situation as one in which increased Lutheran unity

⁶ E. Clifford Nelson, Lutheranism in North America 1914-1970, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), p. 79.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 78-83; Meuser, Formation, pp. 235ff.

was now more possible than ever before. The linguistic and ethnic divisions of Lutheranism in Europe had become magnified when representatives of these various groups migrated to the United States. In 1916 there had been at least twenty-three different major groups of Lutherans here. They were kept apart not only by differences in doctrine, but also by differences in language and nationality. Much of the energy of the Lutheran Church up to the first World War had been taken up in ministering to the immigrants and in the attempts to maintain national or linguistic identities.

But now that these things were no longer so pressing, these Norwegian writers saw a new era beginning. Unity was becoming more evident. The Lutheran Church was becoming Americanized. The old divisions were no longer necessary or important. "Out of the welter of racial origins there is gradually emerging an American type."⁸

They also saw another, more positive reason for their hope that the time was ripe for Lutheran unity. A new emphasis on confessionalism was spreading. The Minneapolis Theses were hailed as an adequate basis for fellowship beyond the American Lutheran Conference. Agreement on these theses ended years of separation for those in the Conference. The National Lutheran Council indeed, included all the members of the Conference, but it was more a forum for

⁸L. W. Boe, "God's Moment and the Next Step in American Lutheranism," Lutheran Herald, XVIII (April 10, 1934), 343.

coordinating special agencies and activities. It had no confessional standard, and its members did not necessarily have fellowship with each other. The Conference was established with a confessional basis, and its members had altar and pulpit fellowship with each other. It was also designed to carry out cooperative work in areas more closely tied to the life of the church, as Christian education and missions.⁹ So these Norwegians wrote of "The Movement for Closer Affiliation among National Lutheran Bodies"¹⁰ and "God's Moment and the Next Step in American Lutheranism."¹¹ J. A. O. Stub summed up how he saw the position of American Lutheranism by saying:

1. It confesses and believes that the Holy Scriptures are the inspired Word of God, the only revelation of God's grace to man, the only rule of faith and life, and the word by which all men will be judged in the last day.
2. It believes in, and confesses, the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost to be the only true God, declared to the world by Christ Jesus and revealed in the Scriptures, who alone is to be confessed and worshipped by all men and who declares the worship of all other gods idolatry.

⁹Wolf, Documents, pp. 295f for the purposes of the National Lutheran Council, and pp. 343f for the Constitution of the American Lutheran Conference.

¹⁰J. A. O. Stub, "The Movement for Closer Affiliation Among National Lutheran Bodies," Lutheran Herald, XV (Feb. 10, 1931), 167-171.

¹¹Boe, "God's Moment," pp. 342f.

3. It believes that man is altogether sinful by nature and utterly unable to keep God's Law and therefore subject to God's wrath and eternal punishment, and by his own efforts can do nothing to save himself.

4. It believes and confesses that Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is the only Savior of the world and man's only way to heaven. He has by His innocent suffering and death redeemed mankind from sin and eternal punishment, and by His perfect obedience has achieved for man righteousness before God.¹²

Thus the Norwegians were against doctrinal "indifference." They insisted that fellowship could be established only with those who share the same confession. They were opposed to church fellowship with other Protestants. N. M. Ylvisaker pointed out that those denominations which had become lax in their doctrine were also decreasing in size and influence. Therefore the Lutheran Church must continue to be a strong confessional church if it was to fulfill its purpose. So unity on the basis of Scriptural unity was not only the right way, it was the only way that would work.¹³ The German Union efforts of the nineteenth century were cited as examples of "indifferentism" to be avoided if the American Lutheran church was to be effective.¹⁴ Olaf Turmo said:

¹²Stub, "The Movement," p. 168.

¹³N. M. Ylvisaker, "Tomorrow's Lutheran Church," Lutheran Herald, XV (Oct. 6, 1931), 1257f.

¹⁴T. F. Gullixson, The Fellowship Question, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, n.d.), pp. 18-20. This essay was first presented to the convention of the American Lutheran Conference in 1932.

It is because of the sinfulness and the dangers of false doctrine that Unionism is so sinful and so dangerous as it is. If I practice religious fellowship with others who do not share my faith and confession, I am virtually telling them that they have as great a right before God to their conceptions of what God's Word teaches as I have to my certainty of what I know to be the truth.¹⁵

So "unity of faith" as reflected in these statements was regarded as the proper basis for church fellowship.¹⁶

But these Norwegians were unwilling to go to the extremes to which they believed both the United Lutheran Church and the Synodical Conference went in this matter. They were critical of the laxity of the United Lutheran Church, especially in its policy on lodge membership and its attitude toward non-Lutheran churches, which allowed for greater religious cooperation with other churches, even though it as a denomination had no membership in inter-church groups. They questioned the equivocating stand on confessional subscription contained in the United

¹⁵Olaf Turmo, "Unionism" (continued) Lutheran Herald, XV (Feb. 24, 1931), 240.

¹⁶But this generally meant "unity in confessional standards." Boe said, "What right based on Scripture has a synod to go back of the record and withhold recognition, if the official record discloses beyond reasonable doubt that there is unity of faith? The only excuse for so doing is an open and notorious negation in practice of the official confession." Boe, "God's Moment," p. 342.

Lutheran Church resolution in 1934 calling for discussions for church fellowship.¹⁷ But they were also critical of the Missouri Synod, calling its attitude "exclusivism" and "sectarianism."¹⁸ They decried demands for further tests of orthodoxy beyond the official record, as long as the practice of the church did not violently negate it.¹⁹ This attitude is summarized by the editor of the Lutheran Herald:

It may be stated that confessional unity in America has been attained to a greater degree than among Lutherans in any other part of the world. All these three large bodies subscribe to the Book of Concord. There is furthermore a remarkable agreement in confessions recently written dealing with differences in the Lutheran Church in America. The Washington Declaration of Principles of the United Lutheran Church is a thoroughly confessional document in agreement with the Minneapolis Theses of American Lutheran Conference. We have no objection to the doctrinal position expressed by the Synodical Conference in its Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod. But all do not agree to these statements, some say there is doctrinal unity sufficient for union or cooperation, others say there is not. Especially is the claim made that there is in practice flagrant violations of the officially confessed faith. These violations are not confined to one body only. It is safe to state that such violations will always be found in a large organization, but when and under what conditions do such violations nullify the confession of the whole body? We shall not

¹⁷The Lutheran Church in America Today," Lutheran Herald, XVIII (Nov. 13, 1934), 1005.

¹⁸Ylvisaker, "Tomorrow's Lutheran Church," p. 1260.

¹⁹Boe, "God's Moment," p. 342.

now and here make up a catalog of the sins of the different groups, or try to sit in judgment on any one.²⁰

Thus the Norwegian Lutheran Church took a mediating position, insisting on doctrinal agreement, but not spelling out what its minimum requirement might be for church fellowship. When they talked about fellowship with those sharing the same confession, or spoke of the unity of the faith, they excluded non-Lutheran churches and included all Lutheran churches which were sufficiently Lutheran. Yet they did not clearly stipulate what criteria should be used to determine this. So T. F. Gullixson used the same Bible passages that the Missouri Synod used to condemn improper church relations, such as Rom. 16:17, 2, Thess. 3:6-15, Titus 3: 10-11, and 2 John 7-11, but applied them only to relations with non-Lutherans. The Synodical Conference churches used these passages to show that it was wrong to be in fellowship even with other Lutheran churches, as long as there was no complete agreement. But Gullixson had reservations about how broadly these passages could be interpreted, saying:

I do not know who can give a definite answer to these questions except by process of logic so far removed in its several steps from the primary statements of Scripture as to give too large a place to possibilities of human error in the personal equation and in progressions of thought.²¹

²⁰Lutheran Union Movements During the Last Two Decades," *Lutheran Herald*, SVIII (April 17, 1934), 365.

²¹Gullixson, *The Fellowship Question*, p. 14.

Lars Boe went so far as to suggest that any individual Lutheran regardless of his synodical affiliation could be admitted to Communion in any Lutheran Church, as long as his own faith was sound. He justified this by saying:

The mistake very often made by us Lutherans is, that we have our eyes so centered on the solidarity of the army that we spend most of our time shooting our own advance guards, insisting that all must move together, even to the smallest detail; or, the advance guards come back to the main body insisting that the whole army must live and operate on the same individualistic basis as they, thus destroying the ability of the army to accomplish that for which it exists. In one case it leads to immobility and stagnation, in the other to chaos.²²

This was a reference to the two extremes, the liberal United Lutheran Church and the conservative Synodical Conference.

This "middle of the road" attitude showed itself in the strong support of the American Lutheran Conference by the Norwegian Lutheran Church at this time. Its representatives regarded the Conference as a way to promote more cooperation and closer contacts among Lutheran Churches, while avoiding either indifferentism or exclusiveness. They noted that because of the Conference, its members had changed their attitudes toward each other more in the few years that the Conference had existed than in the previous twenty-five, largely because there were more opportunities

²²Boe, "God's Moment," p. 342.

for personal contacts. Therefore more such contacts were needed to eliminate the "stone fences of ignorance, lack of sympathetic understanding" that still existed.²³ They said that American Lutheranism needed such a "strong central group"²⁴ to counteract the extremes and to act as the means for establishing a truly united Lutheran church. This is not to say that they wanted organic union, but a more comprehensive federation. President Aasgaard said:

There seems to be some fear that the American Lutheran Conference is simply an entering wedge in an attempt to bring about organic union between the respective bodies interested in this Conference. I know of no such attempt being made by those who are charged with responsibility in their respective synods. On the contrary, I think that the respective synods feel that they have problems of their own that no-one else can assist them in solving but which must be their own responsibility. Speaking of our own Church body, I can assure our members that those who have been entrusted by you with official responsibility have had no thought or plan of organic union with any other church body.²⁵

So in the 1932 convention of the Conference, both Boe and Gullixson presented papers urging greater cooperation and contacts among Lutherans.

²³T. F. Gullixson, "The Field and Future of the American Lutheran Conference," Lutheran Standard, LXXXVIII (May 9, 1931), 5.

²⁴Ylvisaker, "Tomorrow's Lutheran Church," p. 1260.

²⁵"Organic Union," Lutheran Herald, XVIII (July 17, 1934), 643.

Although Gullixson in his paper took a strong stand against compromising with non-Christian groups, such as the lodges, and against unionism, he suggested that there might well be situations where a Lutheran pastor might participate in civic religious ceremonies with non-Lutherans. In this he pursued a middle road, between the United Lutheran Church, which had no compunctions at all about such participation, and the Synodical Conference, which rejected even participation in worship with non-Synodical Conference Lutherans. His position was that when the events were basically civic in nature, and where the community had not yet understood the traditional Lutheran feelings about what they called unionism, a pastor might join with non-Lutherans in worship.

Even so, Gullixson's primary concern was for the preservation of pure doctrine. His main emphasis was that pulpit and altar fellowship should be reserved for "those who share with us our mutual faith and confessions."²⁶

Boe went still further. He stated that on the one hand, the United Lutheran Church was willing to establish relations with all the other Lutheran groups. On the other hand, the Synodical Conference might be willing to establish some cooperative relationships with some of the members of the American Lutheran Conference, but only in activities not directly connected with preaching and

²⁶Gullixson, The Fellowship Question, p. 8.

teaching. And this would be only as long as these other groups did not have relations with the United Lutheran Church. Boe concluded that the members of the American Lutheran Conference needed to face this situation squarely, to try to determine how they could maintain the best possible relations with both groups. He regarded this as the opportune moment for this kind of union effort, if the Conference would take the first step. Already in 1932 he had stated:

The American Lutheran Conference has a great responsibility and opportunity before it. It must be fair, just and friendly to both wings, not only because it is right and just toward the others, but because of itself. Anyone who knows the constituency of the American Lutheran Conference, at least of some of its Synods, knows that they have in their membership those who tend either way. That which has stood as a hindrance many a time between Lutherans, is that we have always thought of relationships with other synods and church in terms of the ultimate, pulpit and altar fellowship. Has the time come when we think of relations with others without necessarily confining them to the ultimate, in terms of friendly contact, out of which the Holy Spirit may lead us to better things.²⁷

He said in 1934:

If the Lutheran Church of America has the courage and initiative now to crystallize into form the fellowship which actually is being practiced with good conscience and in accord with Scripture between individual members of the United Lutheran Church and the American Lutheran Conference, and in lesser degree between them and the Synodical

²⁷L. W. Boe, "An Open Declaration of Aim and Purpose," Lutheran Herald, XVI (Dec. 6, 1932), 1384f.

Conference, we can look forward to a tremendous development in the next few years.²⁸

In the resolutions he presented to the Conference Convention, he said:

V. That in order to make the witnessing of the Lutheran Church united and effective, friendly relationships and contacts between the Lutheran bodies should be established on such a basis as to place no synod or church in a false position in relation to its own faith practice;

VI. That the Lutheran bodies should, insofar as their faith and practice permit, co-operate in good works to the glory of God and the saving of our people; and finally,

VII. That the Lutheran bodies, in friendly relationship and contact, together should "wait upon the Lord" for a revealing of His will and purpose as to the next step forward in the Lutheran Church in America toward full recognition in pulpit and altar fellowship.²⁹

Out of his presentation came definite action on the matter of comity. Prior to that time, there had been a loose comity arrangement through the National Lutheran Council.³⁰ Also, the constitution of the American Lutheran Conference had specifically mentioned "Allocation of work in the Home Mission fields" as one of its

²⁸Boe, "God's Moment," p. 343.

²⁹"Minutes of the First Biennial Convention of the American Lutheran Conference (Milwaukee, 1932)," Journal of the American Lutheran Conference, II (March, 1937), 39.

³⁰Frederick K. Wentz, Lutherans In Concert, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968), p. 24.

objects.³¹ But Boe's proposals containing a definite course of action were the catalyst for the implementation of a policy on comity. The 1932 convention of the Conference had adopted a resolution creating five Home Mission districts for cooperative study.³² In 1934 this was expanded to nine regions, and a plan for action was formally adopted by the constituent bodies. This went beyond anything the National Lutheran Council had been able to accomplish. By 1941, the Conference president, E. E. Ryden wrote in terms reminiscent of the proposal Boe had made:

There has been a real effort to eliminate needless competition on the Home Mission field. For instance, mergers have been effected from situations where two or more congregations of different synods have occupied the same territory. In such cases the body which has held preponderant influence has stayed on, while the other synod has surrendered the field. In other instances arrangements have been made whereby the pastor of one synod not only serves his own congregation, but also ministers to the church of another synod. This policy of "give and take" on the Home Mission front of course, is only in the beginnings. Vast readjustments still need to be made in order to conserve both money and man-power, and many difficulties may be anticipated, but the achievements already made in this field augur well for the future.³³

³¹ Wolf, Documents, p. 344.

³² "Minutes of the American Lutheran Conference (1932)," Journal of the American Lutheran Conference, II (March, 1937), 40f.

³³ E. E. Ryden, "How the American Lutheran Conference has Furthered Lutheran Unity," Journal of the American Lutheran Conference, VI (Nov., 1941), 817.

To summarize, the published statements of representative members of the Norwegian Lutheran Church on the question of Lutheran unity between 1921 and 1935 show several things. First of all, the Norwegians insisted on some kind of doctrinal and confessional agreement. Secondly, they were not rigidly opposed to cooperative efforts, especially among Lutheran churches, on the basis of less than complete agreement in all doctrines and practices. Thirdly, they were enthusiastic supporters of the American Lutheran Conference as a mediating group between the United Lutheran Church and the Synodical Conference. Fourthly, they were to be an influence on the thinking of the American Lutheran Church in this matter.

The American Lutheran Church

The American Lutheran Church at this time was adjusting to its new situation as a merged denomination and as a member of the American Lutheran Conference. Much of its energy in the early 1930's was absorbed in maintaining itself, especially in the face of the national depression. But these things also forced it to evaluate its position toward other churches. It was torn between its historic and ethnic links to the Missouri Synod and the Synodical Conference, and its new-found fellowship in the American Lutheran Conference. Thus it was influenced by both the Missouri Synod and the Norwegians in its approach to church fellowship. It

was a conservative church, which traditionally had adopted the position that mutually agreeable doctrinal statements covering all points in controversy were indispensable before church fellowship. But its attempts to achieve agreement this way with the Missouri Synod had ended unsuccessfully and with much hard feelings in 1929.

President C. C. Hein wrote in 1933,

We have made one earnest, sincere and conscientious attempt to get together with Missouri. We have utterly failed, and I for my part do not believe that there is any use in having further conferences.³⁴

On the other hand, it had had successful negotiations with the Scandinavians on the basis of the Minneapolis Theses of 1925.

Therefore representatives of the American Lutheran Church wrote about closer church relations at a time when the American Lutheran Church was experimenting with an organic union between the former Buffalo, Iowa and Ohio synods, and with a wider fellowship for the first time since the Ohio Synod had left the Synodical Conference in 1881. Although some of the leaders in the new denomination leaned toward the harder line of the Synodical Conference, and others toward the more pragmatic approach of the Scandinavians, most were satisfied with the progress

³⁴Letter, C. C. Hein to P. E. Kretzmann, Feb. 22, 1933, Archives of the American Lutheran Church, Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, Missouri Synod file.

being made towards closer cooperation. They regarded the Minneapolis Theses as a valuable tool for bringing about better understanding.³⁵ They spoke of the American Lutheran Conference as a model for further unification. Representative writers of the American Lutheran Church felt that nothing really stood in the way of complete unity of all Lutheran bodies except a few matters of church polity and practice.³⁶

So the American Lutheran Church generally approved of the attempts to eliminate "opposition altars" and to promote friendly contacts between the various Lutheran bodies. The approach of the President of their California District, C. H. S. Hunziker, was typical. When the Southern California community of Lynwood was developed in 1930, both the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church began to do mission work there. As a result, President Hunziker wrote to G. H. Smukal, the president of the Southern California District of the Missouri Synod to protest its establishment of an "opposition altar." On April 14, 1931, he asked if the new Missouri Synod missionary in the Lynwood area would continue to work there, in spite of the fact that the American Lutheran pastor had been active in the community for four months. He said:

³⁵Luke Schmucker, "The March Toward Lutheran Unity," Lutheran Standard, LXXXVIII (Nov. 7, 1931), 6.

³⁶Ibid. Otto Mees, "The Spirit of the American Lutheran Conference," Lutheran Herald, XV (Dec. 1, 1931), 1512.

I am asking these questions, not in the spirit of criticism, but in order that we may have an understanding and may have an agreement and for the cause of Lutheranism and the Lord's work. While we as synods differ on some points, it seems to me, that we have enough major points in common so that the one Lutheran Synod can entrust to the other bodies in the field the work which can be done by one Lutheran pastor. There are still so many places in California where there is no Lutheran Church. These are an open door for both synods without the one interfering with the other.³⁷

President Smukal answered him on April 29, saying that the doctrinal errors and the unionistic tendencies of the American Lutheran Church prevented the Missouri Synod from vacating that mission field. He wrote:

If we vacate or leave a mission field in your synod's favor, we should be subjecting souls to your erroneous doctrines and to your unionistic leadership. We are happier in our firm position in and on God's Word than your synod can ever be in its doctrinal errors and practice of unionism, and by entering on the agreement suggested by you we should be harming the cause of God and of true Lutheranism.³⁸

It is no wonder that many in the American Lutheran Church felt closer to the other Lutheran churches in the American Lutheran Conference than to the Missouri Synod, in spite of the similarities in ethnic and doctrinal backgrounds between it and the Missouri Synod.

³⁷Letter, C. H. S. Hunziker to G. H. Smukal, April 14, 1931, Archives of the American Lutheran Church, Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, Missouri Synod-Synodical Conference file.

³⁸Letter, G. H. Smukal to C. H. S. Hunziker, April 29, 1931, Archives, American Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod-Synodical Conference file.

At the same time, there were many of the leaders in the American Lutheran Church who were hesitant about hurrying further unity. They saw the lodge issue as a major stumbling block in the way of church unity. When O. H. Pannkoek, a liberal "maverick" in the Missouri Synod, said that Lutheran unity was a necessity if the church was to fulfill its responsibilities, the editor of the Lutheran Standard of the American Lutheran Church took issue:

We do well to combine with our campaign for greater unity a crusade for greater fidelity to Christ and his word and all that this implies. Unity at any price will not of itself achieve greater fidelity to Christ and his words but greater fidelity to Christ and his word will of necessity affect greater unity.³⁹

He also criticized Pannkoek for calling the past divisions in the Church "pitiful," saying that refusing to have church fellowship with other Lutheran churches because some of their pastors were Masons certainly could not be called a "petty" cause for separation. The editor of the Kirchenblatt of the American Lutheran Church went further and said it would be "thoroughly pitiful cowardice" to ignore this problem just to achieve unity.⁴⁰ President Hein of the American Lutheran Church indicated the same thing in his presidential address to the 1934 convention. He said:

³⁹"Concerning Lutheran Unity," Lutheran Standard, XCI (Oct. 13, 1934), 2.

⁴⁰Editorial footnote, "Das Gebot der Stunde: Lutherische Einigkeit," Kirchenblatt, 77 (Oct. 6, 1934), 5.

It is not a difference in doctrine that separates us from the United Lutheran Church in America, but a difference in practice, i.e., the fact that notwithstanding the official declarations of the United Lutheran Church in America relative to anti-Christian secret societies and fellowship with non-Lutherans, a number of their pastors are members of the Masonic Lodge and that a number practice indiscriminate altar and pulpit fellowship with representatives of other denominations.⁴¹

This same convention reaffirmed a strong stand against the religious teachings of the lodge but did allow pastoral discretion in whether to participate in civic religious ceremonies, along the lines which Gullixson and Boe suggested at the 1932 American Lutheran Conference convention.

There were those in the American Lutheran Church, like P.-H. Buehring, the Dean of Capitol Seminary, who agreed completely with the more rigid approach of the Missouri Synod. He said that the Lutheran Church stands "firmly for the whole body of truth as God has revealed it in His holy word" and did not regard it as charity to "ignore any departures from God's truth." Therefore, he insisted that the Lutheran church continue to point out "any deviation from that truth with a view of correcting the error."⁴²

⁴¹American Lutheran Church, Minutes, (1934), p. 23.

⁴²p. H. Buehring, "The Catholicity of Lutheranism," The Pastor's Monthly, XII (July, 1934), 403.

But the general view in the American Lutheran Church literature at this time was that although Boe's idea of selective fellowship was too bold,⁴³ complete agreement was not necessary for closer church cooperation. This was why the American Lutheran Church belonged to so many inter-Lutheran organizations. It was opposed to unionism, but did not consider church cooperation with other churches espousing a strong Lutheran position to be necessarily unionistic. Already in 1930 C. C. Hein had clearly pointed out that the two things he regarded as dividing American Lutheranism were unionism and separation. He criticized both the Missouri Synod for refusing to recognize other synods as Lutheran, and the United Lutheran Church for disregarding the Galesburg Rule, which had been established in 1875 by the General Council. It had stipulated that there was to be no pulpit or altar fellowship with non-Lutherans.⁴⁴

So the American Lutheran Church did not deny that there were problems to be solved before complete Lutheran unity, but it did not insist that every issue had to be resolved before there could be fellowship. Hein said in

⁴³"Kirchliche Chronik," Kirchliche Zeitschrift, 58 (June, 1934), 375.

⁴⁴C. C. Hein, "President Hein's Message to Synod, (concluded)" Lutheran Standard, LXXXVIII (Aug, 9, 1930), 2. For the Galesburg Rule, see Wolf, Documents, p. 171.

1934 that before the American Lutheran Church and the United Lutheran Church could establish pulpit and altar fellowship, "they must come to an agreement on these matters which are of vital importance to the life and the work of the church."⁴⁵ He also said, on the other hand, that if minor doctrines, such as the status of Sunday or matters concerning marriage and divorce, "were essential to unity in the faith, and if this type of unity is to be the basis of a union with other Lutheran bodies, there is no hope whatsoever for the Lutherans of this country ever to get together."⁴⁶ Along the same lines, the Kirchenblatt said that unity with the United Lutheran Church must not be at the cost of truth, but reiterated that doctrinal unity does not depend on agreement in every doctrine, for this would be a false perfectionism.⁴⁷

Throughout this period, the writers of the American Lutheran Church were emphasizing that Christian love and a friendly attitude were as important as doctrinal purity. This was done in an attempt to preserve two aspects of their understanding of church unity. There must be unity in faith (although not necessarily unanimity), and there

⁴⁵ American Lutheran Church, Minutes, (1934), p. 23.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ "Vereingung mit der U.L.C.?" Kirchenblatt, 77 (Aug. 25, 1934), 3.

could not be indifference about doctrine and practice. At the same time, this pure doctrine must be sought with a spirit of love, penitence, and a willingness to bear with the other Christian. The Lutheran Standard said in an editorial in 1934 that there needed to be a willingness to give up "unchristian practices and alliances, unchristian judgments upon others, unchristian boastings, unchristian competition, that hinder fellowship."⁴⁸ So the American Lutheran Church refused to sanction fellowship with pastors and congregations of the United Lutheran Church until official pulpit and altar fellowship had been established, but also said:

The church does not regard joint services at historical anniversaries and other cooperative activities, . . . as a violation of the spirit and principles of the constitution so long as the united testimony given in such services and through such activity promotes conservative Lutheranism.⁴⁹

The position of the American Lutheran Church lay between that of the Norwegian Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod. The main differences between it and the Norwegians were its stricter stand on the lodge issue, and its practice of basing interchurch relations on more detailed doctrinal statements rather than on the official confessional statements alone. The main difference between

⁴⁸"The Church Moves On," Lutheran Standard, XCI (Oct. 6, 1934), 3.

⁴⁹American Lutheran Church, Minutes, (1934), p. 235.

it and the Missouri Synod was that it did not insist on complete agreement in doctrine and practice as a prerequisite for church fellowship, as the Missouri Synod did.

The Missouri Synod

The third major group of Lutherans in America was the Synodical Conference, of which the Missouri Synod was the dominant synod. The Missouri Synod's position in doctrinal matters was much more clearly defined than in the other synods, since its periodicals, all publications of its Concordia Publishing House, and all District and Synodical essays were subject to faculty censorship and convention approval. This was not the case in the other synods, in spite of masthead statements like "Official English Organ of the American Lutheran Church." This contributed to the misconception of a monolithic Missouri Synod, since this official approval was supposed to keep all publications consistent with pure doctrine and Missouri Synod tradition.⁵⁰ Whether this was always true or not, it is true that published statements can be regarded as quasi-official, and thus the position of the Missouri Synod can easily be determined.

⁵⁰ Theodore Graebner, "The Burden of Infallibility," pp. 55-94; (this was written in 1948); "For a Penitent Jubilee," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XLV (Feb., 1972), 3-28; (this was first published in 1948); Arthur Repp, "Changes in the Missouri Synod," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXVIII (July-August, 1967), 458-478.

In brief, the Missouri Synod insisted that before any type of cooperation with another church body or its members could be considered, there had to be complete agreement in doctrine and practice. This was determined not only by what the church body said in its official statements, but by what was tolerated without church discipline among its members. To establish church fellowship, then, there had to be an agreement worked out on all controverted doctrines, and satisfactory practical applications enforced. Exceptions to this rule were made in cooperative work in areas not directly involved in religious teaching, such as joint meetings of church statisticians or editors.⁵¹ Even in these areas, prayer with the representatives of these other churches was condemned as improper "prayer fellowship," since the Missouri Synod and the rest of the Synodical Conference interpreted passages such as Rom: 16:17 to mean that all religious intercourse should be limited only to those in doctrinal agreement. These ideas were clearly expressed in published statements from 1931 to 1935.⁵²

⁵¹ Theodore Graebner, "Remarks at Meeting of National Lutheran Editors' Association Rock Island, Ill. Sept. 25, '35," (Typewritten). Cf. Graebner, The Problem of Lutheran Union, 99-101.

⁵² To give an idea of the interest the issue of church fellowship generated within the Missouri Synod, note the list of seventy-four articles and editorial notes about the situation among the Lutheran bodies in America published in the Concordia Theological Monthly between 1930 to 1934. "For the Sake of Orientation," Concordia Theological Monthly, VI (Feb. 1935), 138f.

This was a different standard for church fellowship than any other major Lutheran group held. Whereas even the American Lutheran Church insisted only on a basic unity of faith, the Missouri Synod wanted unanimity. For instance, the reaction in the Concordia Theological Monthly to the article by J. A. O. Stub was that he was not strict enough. He had suggested a "reasonable unanimity and unity of faith" as the standard for fellowship. J. T. Mueller in his review said that there must be "absolute unity of faith. Confessional Lutherans must insist on nothing less."⁵³ The Lutheran Witness criticized Luke Schmucker and his article for saying that American Lutherans are in doctrinal agreement.

The Lutheran mergers of recent years, we are sorry to say, have not been made on the basis of actual doctrinal agreement in strict conformity with the Scriptures and the Symbolical books of the Lutheran Church as a true exhibition of the Scriptures. Only the ignorant and those who refuse to see the situation as it is can speak of real unity. Union they have achieved, but not unity. We are saying this without any bitterness whatever but rather in a spirit of true charity. Some so-called Lutheran churches have already gone a far way in the wrong direction, and only the intervention of God's grace can prevent a real apostasy.⁵⁴

⁵³J. T. M[ueller], "The Movement for Closer Affiliation Among National Lutheran Bodies," Concordia Theological Monthly, II (June, 1931), 469.

⁵⁴J. H. C. F[ritz], "Lutheran Unity," The Lutheran Witness, L (Nov. 25, 1931), 399f.

This approach was taken to an extreme by Paul E. Kretzmann, a professor at Concordia Seminary. He was a prolific writer on many subjects and was especially interested in warning against false doctrines.⁵⁵ In 1933 he wrote an article comparing the teachings of the Missouri Synod with those of the other Lutheran bodies in America. He was unusually mild in his criticisms, finding little specific evidence of false teaching or practice. However at the end of his article he said:

A few other questions which will have to be discussed and settled according to the word of God are those of the celebration of Sunday, which cannot be said to be divinely commanded, certain questions of marriage and divorce, particularly the validity of a rightful betrothal, the value of John's baptism, and a number of other points, chiefly in the field of Christian ethics.⁵⁶

This almost destroyed future American Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod discussions. The Kirchenblatt responded editorially, "We also are not of the opinion that agreement in all questions is essential for unity in faith, for example the question of marriage of sister-in-laws and the baptism of John."⁵⁷ Furthermore

⁵⁵He eventually left the Missouri Synod because he believed it was sanctioning false doctrines. He then was instrumental in forming the Orthodox Lutheran Church in 1951.

⁵⁶p. E. Kretzmann, "Foreward. Can the Lutheran Bodies of America Get Together?" Concordia Theological Monthly, IV (Jan., 1933), 10.

⁵⁷"Vereinigung?" Kirchenblatt, p. 3.

President Hein said in his message to the 1934 convention of the American Lutheran Church:

If these matters are essential to unity in the faith and if this type of unity is to be the basis of a union with other Lutheran bodies, there is no hope whatsoever for Lutherans of this country ever to get together.⁵⁸

Kretzmann tried to soften his position by writing:

As for the final points contained in my article, the context indicates that these are not on the same level with the doctrinal questions treated before. However, I believe that even in this case an agreement is possible on the basis of the word of God and the Lutheran Confessions.⁵⁹

But he had clearly said in his article, "All the doctrines of the Bible must be considered as essential in this platform, since the difference between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines is one merely of degrees."⁶⁰

Hein had every right to interpret him as he did.

The tendency of the Missouri Synod to approach things in the tradition of the orthodox Lutheran

⁵⁸American Lutheran Church. Minutes, (1934), p. 25. This merely repeated what he had written to Kretzmann. He wrote that if unanimity on these points was a condition of fellowship, "There absolutely is no possibility of getting together with Missouri. All future conferences are useless." Letter, C. C. Hein to P. E. Kretzmann, Feb. 22, 1933, Archives, American Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod file.

⁵⁹Letter, P. E. Kretzmann, to C. C. Hein, Feb. 20, 1933, Archives, American Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod file.

⁶⁰Kretzmann, "Foreword," Concordia Theological Monthly, 95.

systematics of the seventeenth century is obvious in this article. Not only did Kretzmann use the classifications of the dogmaticians in his discussion (Bibliology, Theology, Anthropology and Cosmology, Christology, Soteriology, Pneumatology, Ecclesiology and Eschatology), but he and other Missouri Synod writers also insisted on using theses and antitheses in drafting doctrinal statements. In other words, it was not enough to agree on a positive statement. To show that there was true agreement, and that all the old "false doctrines" of the past were truly abandoned and not merely camouflaged, there had to be agreement on a statement condemning errors.

Implicit in this was the idea that the orthodoxy of a church body is judged not only by official statements, but also by what is written and taught by individuals in the church, since the church body is responsible for correcting error. Thus when Theodore Graebner wrote a book in 1935 giving more detail than Kretzmann had on the doctrinal positions of the various Lutheran churches, the modus operandi he used was to demonstrate that every synod outside of the Synodical Conference allowed doctrines and practices that negated the official doctrinal positions. To do this he quoted from articles, books and speeches by members of each synod, and he gave examples of what he regarded as unionistic participation on the part of individuals of the various bodies.

There were a number of inaccuracies and misquotations in this book.⁶¹ One reviewer suggested that it was put together in haste so that the delegates at the synodical convention of 1935 might have a lot of information.⁶² Others were not so charitable. The reviewer in the Kirchliche Zeitschrift said:

I found one situation recorded in it about which I personally remembered very precisely the apparent justification of the "offense", and the explanation fully satisfied me, at the time at least. However, in Graebner's book I found only the accusation repeated and not an accompanying explanation. That may not have been by design, but it startled me, and prompted me to ask, whether there might not be in this or that other situation an explanation which might put the report in another light.⁶³

However, in the Missouri Synod, both in reviews and in general reactions, the book was accepted as a clear, detailed, and irrefutable proof that there were deep differences among all the Lutheran bodies. Furthermore, the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, had asked that the attitudes and teachings of the other

⁶¹Dr. J. A. O. Stub, who was singled out for criticism in the essay, replied in a nine-page typewritten letter, pointing out inaccuracies and unfairly drawn conclusions that he knew of. Letter, J. A. O. Stub to J. A. Aasgaard, May 1, 1936, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Graebner file.

⁶²J. Bodensieck, "The Problem of Lutheran Union and Other Essays," Kirchenblatt, 78 (Aug. 3, 1935), 18.

⁶³"The Problem of Lutheran Union and Other Essays," Kirchliche Zeitschrift, 59 (Nov., 1936), 692. (Translated by the author).

Lutheran bodies be gathered together in one book. Graebner's book was regarded as having fulfilled this mandate. Therefore

The Lutheran Witness suggested:

Everyone who must deal with members of a synod or a Lutheran body differing from his own ought to have this essay in order that he himself may see clearly and also be able to submit conclusive evidence for his position to others.⁶⁴

But regardless of its accuracy or fairness in reporting, it had a polemical tone and was certainly not conducive to creating good will for the Missouri Synod. In fact, Charles Jacobs of the United Lutheran Church reacted in bitterness and sarcasm. He said of Graebner:

He stands just where his synod has always stood. He reasserts its position with firmness and courage. There is only one way to Lutheran Church union. We must reopen all of the old theological questions and settle them. Moreover we must settle them by accenting the positions that the Missouri Synod already occupies. We must also accept its conception of Lutheran practice, and we must expel from the membership of our church bodies all those who consciously refuse to abide by this acceptance.⁶⁵

This was an accurate presentation of the position of the Missouri Synod on Lutheran unity in 1935.

⁶⁴[Martin] S[ommer], "The Problem of Lutheran Union and Other Essays," The Lutheran Witness, LV (Feb. 11, 1936), 46.

⁶⁵Charles M. Jacobs, "The Problem of Lutheran Union: A Review," Lutheran Church Quarterly, VIII (Sept., 1935), 414.

So the Missouri Synod writers regarded any doctrinal error as the little leaven that could destroy the church.⁶⁶ The plea to emphasize what the churches held in common was rejected, in favor of continuing to clearly declare what was in controversy.⁶⁷ Dr. Charles P. Krauth of the old General Council had warned that error goes through three stages in damaging the church: toleration, equal rights with the truth, and supremacy over the truth. The Missouri Synod writers warned against allowing even the first stage, lest the truth be lost.⁶⁸ This "Domino theory" caused the Missouri Synod to resist any divergence or leeway in doctrine.⁶⁹ So church cooperation, fellowship, or unity depended on unity in doctrine and practice, agreement on the truth.

But what was the truth? This was the crux of the problem. The Missouri Synod insisted that it had the truth, and thus appeared aloof and self-righteous to others.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ John T. Mueller, "Facing Our Worst Enemy--The Little Leaven," Concordia Theological Monthly, I (Jan., 1930), 38.

⁶⁷ [Martin] S[ommer], "Emphasizing that Wherein We Agree," The Lutheran Witness, L (Nov. 25, 1931), 400.

⁶⁸ J. H. C. F[ritz], "Church Union and the Three Stages of Error's Progress," The Lutheran Witness, LIV (Jan. 15, 1935), 18-20; J. H. C. F., "The Wrecking Power of Unionism," The Lutheran Witness, LIV (May 25, 1935), 182-185.

⁶⁹ Graebner, "The Burden of Infallibility," pp. 88f.

⁷⁰ G. J. F. "Th. Graebner, Dr. Francis Pieper, A biographical sketch," Kirchliche Zeitschrift, 56 (Feb., 1932), 105f said "It seems almost impossible for many Missourians to

Indeed, it acknowledged this criticism and accepted it as inevitable for those who refuse to be moved from the truth in a climate of unionism and indifference to the truth.⁷¹

It insisted that its interpretation of the Bible was correct. Therefore, "all who are sincere in their confession of Scriptures and in their acceptance of the Lutheran Confessions should be able to come to an agreement."⁷²

After all, it reasoned:

. . . if two work the same problem and both get the right answer, both will also get the same answer, they need not try to harmonize their answers afterward. Just so all those who teach the truth will agree with others who teach the truth without trying to agree. The truth is one and always agrees with itself. The truth never contradicts the truth.⁷³

write even a biography without bringing in the old refrain 'we are better than others'." One of the essays collected in The Problem of Lutheran Union and Other Essays by Th. Graebner was titled, "As Others See Us," pp. 107-134. It gathered together many quotations from non-Missouri Synod writers that were very critical of the Missouri Synod.

⁷¹Th. Graebner, "The Indwelling of the Trinity in the Heart of the Believer," Concordia Theological Monthly, I (Feb., 1930), 97f; G[raebner], editorial, The Lutheran Witness, XIX (July 8, 1930), 228ff; [William] A[rndt], "Is Missourian 'Aloofness' Justifiable?" Concordia Theological Monthly, V (Sept., 1934), 723f.

⁷²Letter, P. E. Kretzmann to C. C. Hein, Feb. 20, 1933, Archives, American Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod file.

⁷³[Martin] S[ommer], "Lutheran Unity," The Lutheran Witness, LII (Dec. 19, 1933), 427.

It is no wonder that it spoke of those churches which it regarded as indifferent to sound doctrine as "so-called Lutheran Churches."⁷⁴

This had caused an in-bred provincial approach to doctrine. The epitome of this was the "Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod" adopted in 1932. This was produced by a committee formed at its 1929 convention, with Francis Pieper as chairman and chief author. The 1929 convention had directed this committee to "formulate theses which, beginning with the Status controversiae, are to present the doctrine of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions in the shortest and most simple manner."⁷⁵ The controversies referred to were those which had prevented the adoption of the Intersynodical Theses in 1929. However, the document approved in 1932 did not precisely carry out these instructions. Pieper had written several doctrinal statements earlier: two in 1893, one in 1897 (subtitled "Eine kurze Darstellung der Lehrstellung der Missouri

⁷⁴J. H. C. F[ritz], "Lutheran Unity," The Lutheran Witness, L (Nov. 25, 1931), 399.

⁷⁵The Missouri Synod. Proceedings, (1929), p. 131. "Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod" appeared first under its German title, "Theses zur kurzen Darlegung der Lehrstellung der Missourisynode," in Concordia Theological Monthly, II (May, 1931), 321-336, and then in English in the June issue of the Monthly, pp. 401 to 416.

Synode"), and one in 1922.⁷⁶ The "Brief Statement" relied heavily on these earlier works, especially the 1897 one.⁷⁷ Thus it was more an apologia for the doctrinal position of the Missouri Synod from 1893 to 1931 than merely a clarification of the issues separating the various German Lutheran churches in America in 1929.

For instance, there were several articles in the Brief Statement that had no parallels in the Inter-synodical Theses, nor were the doctrines they dealt with in controversy among the Lutherans in 1921. These were the articles on God, creation, faith in Christ, good works, means of grace, and church and state. Nor did the Brief Statement contain any direct refutation of the Inter-synodical Theses. The specific criticisms made in 1929 regarding the Intersynodical Theses were dealt with only indirectly, usually by adding to the earlier documents

⁷⁶Francis Pieper, "Ueberblick uber andere Stellung in Lehre und Praxis, welche wir als Synode dein uns umgebenden Irrthum und Missbrauch gegenuber einnehmen," Deutschen evangelische lutherische Synode von Missouri, Ohio, und andere Staaten. Verhandlungen (St. Louis, 1893), pp. 26-53; "The Synodical Conference," The Distinctive Doctrines and Usages of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1893), pp. 119-166; "Ich glaube, darum rede ich," presumably published by Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, in 1897, although these data are not given; Wahrend ihres funfundsiebsig jahrigen Bestehens gelehrt hat und nach lehrt (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922).

⁷⁷Carl S. Meyer, "The Historical Background of 'A Brief Statement,'" (concluded), p. 541.

sentences or paragraphs which spoke of the current issues and controversies.

It was regarded as a unilateral action at the time. There was little reaction to it outside the Missouri Synod. In fact, President Hein of the American Lutheran Church said in 1933:

I am frank to say that I am so disgusted with the spirit that manifested itself in these resolutions [of the 1929 Missouri Synod convention] that to this day I have not as yet read the new series of theses which were published in the Concordia Theological Monthly of May, 1931, and adopted by your synod in 1932.⁷⁸

It was originally adopted as a stimulus to similar action by the other synods, and the hope was expressed that "these theses will ultimately be adopted by all the various Lutheran Synods of our country."⁷⁹ But Pieper, at least, did not intend them as the basis for future negotiations and agreement. Although in later years some in the Synodical Conference thought that it had been written "to serve as a basis for future fellowship with the American Lutheran Church and any other body which might be ready

⁷⁸Letter, C. C. Hein to P. E. Kretzmann, Feb. 22, 1933, Archives of the American Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod file.

⁷⁹Th. Laetsch, "Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod," Concordia Theological Monthly, IV (April, 1933), 316.

to demonstrate its agreement with us in doctrine and practice."⁸⁰ This was not explicitly stated at the time of adoption. It became the basis for discussion between the negotiating committees in 1935 because it was more comprehensive than the Minneapolis Theses and thus suited the thesis-antithesis method of the Missouri Synod better.

If the Brief Statement did not fulfill the requirements set down by the 1929 convention, why was it adopted? The answer lies in the fact that it was the work of Professor Pieper, who had instructed probably three-quarters of the pastors of the Missouri Synod in dogmatics. Not only did this mean that the synod would not be able to evaluate it objectively, but the synod tended to base its position on its own "church fathers." Pieper had died in 1931, and his magnum opus, Christian Dogmatics was already quoted as an authority on doctrinal issues.⁸¹ Therefore, respect for his memory and the high regard for his work prevented the development of any serious hesitation about adopting his last great effort.⁸²

⁸⁰Theodore Graebner, "The Cloak of the Cleric," p. 5. This was first written in 1950. "The Burden of Infallibility," p. 93.

⁸¹Graebner, "The Burden," p. 90.

⁸²A number of minor changes were made at the 1932 convention, but the committee charged with Intersynodical matters "did not feel called upon to widen the scope of the theses by adding additional paragraphs nor to add

As a result, Fischer's assessment of the situation in the early 1930's was basically true.

During the first third of the twentieth century, meanwhile, the Missouri Synod's confessional position seemed to have become ever more detailed and rigid. . . . The "Brief Statement" (1932) made a lengthy and detailed polemical document binding upon the synod.⁸³

Dominating all of the literature from Missouri Synod writers during this period was the subject of unionism. The Missouri Synod used this word for any improper association with members of other denominations. In all of Lutheran literature at this time, separatism, or improper refusal of fellowship, and unionism, or improper establishment of fellowship, were described as the two big evils in the church. However, whenever the Missouri Synod writers spoke of these two sins, unionism was always emphasized as the greater of the two evils. Separatism was generally added almost as an afterthought, or even justified.⁸⁴

additional proof-texts nor to make unnecessary changes in phraseology." Missouri Synod. Proceedings (1929) p. 154. This was in answer to the criticism from a pastoral conference in Brazil that the Brief Statement did not cover all doctrines or practices.

⁸³ Fischer, "The Confessionalism of American Lutheran Church Bodies of German Background," p. 81.

⁸⁴ In the essay presented by P. E. Kretzmann to the 1930 Synodical Conference convention, entitled "Wehre Union im Gegensatz zu Unionismus und Separatismus," he devoted twenty-nine pages to the evils of Unionism, and only four to the evils of Separatism. Even in his presentation of Separatism, he distinguished between

Therefore, the Kirchenblatt of the American Lutheran Church was criticized for suggesting that cooperation in church work was permissible with the amount of agreement existing among the Lutheran Churches.⁸⁵ The Association of Lutheran Seminar Students was called "unionistic." The Concordia Theological Monthly said of it:

For, however one wishes to justify this gathering, it cannot be denied that here a number of people met representing two sections of the Lutheran Church which are opposed to each other on important points, that they fellowshiped with each other in the manner of brethren, and that they declared it their set purpose to continue in this course. . . Where such a course is pursued, what, we ask, becomes of the warning of St. Paul against the "little leaven which leaveneth the whole lump"?⁸⁶

Therefore Graebner concluded, "The difference [between the Lutheran Churches] is in the definition of Christian fellowship."⁸⁷ For there was general agreement among the Synodical Conference and most of the American Lutheran Conference that organic union depended on some sort of doctrinal unity. However, the disagreement came not only on

Separatism in a good sense, prompted by concern over pure doctrine, and Separatism in an evil sense, prompted by mere differences in ceremonies. Der Evangelische-lutherische Synodalkonferenz von Nordamerika. Verhandlungen der zweiunddreissigsten Versammlung (Quincy, Ill., 1930), pp. 35f. The essay begins on p. 6.

⁸⁵[Theodore] E[ngelder], "Vereinigung mit der U.L.C.?" Concordia Theological Monthly, V (Nov., 1934), 877.

⁸⁶[William] A[rndt], "Lutheran Seminaries Fellowship Each Other," Concordia Theological Monthly, II (Feb., 1931), 136.

⁸⁷Graebner, The Problem of Lutheran Union, p. 102.

how much agreement was necessary, but what could be done with less than total agreement. The American Lutheran Conference churches believed that cooperative Lutheran associations such as the National Lutheran Educational Conference, the Lutheran Home Missions Council, the Lutheran Foreign Missions Conference, the Intersynodical Committee on Elementary Religious Education, the Lutheran Student Association, the Association of Lutheran Seminary Students, the American Federation of Lutheran Brotherhoods, the Conference of Evangelical Lutheran Deaconess Motherhouses in America, and other occasional groups were not unionistic. The Synodical Conference did.

Graebner said:

The significance of these cooperative movements has been completely overlooked. We have found many references to them as examples of a gradual approach towards Lutheran union. They are more than that. They are evidence and proof of a union that already exists. These cooperative efforts are by no means in externals only. Note the difference. There is no Christian fellowship, but only a similarity of problems and interests involved when, let me say, Lutheran statisticians meet together or Lutheran publishers. But to conduct the educational work of the Church by joint deliberations and to formulate its missionary program; to consult together in conference as Inner Mission workers and editors,--this is more than a coordination or mutual helpfulness in externals. No one can read the reports of these meetings without being struck by a feature that is identical in them all--the fraternal relations professed by those who participate in them. Even without

opening and closing devotions these conferences are all predicated on a recognition of one another as fellow-Lutherans.⁸⁸

This was all a concept foreign to the thinking of the Missouri Synod.

This brings up the facet of the Missouri Synod understanding of unionism that the other Lutherans found hardest to understand. That was "prayer fellowship." Although this was variously interpreted, even within the Synodical Conference, it was generally agreed in the Missouri Synod up until this time that prayer with other Christians in a situation where denominational differences were ignored was sinful unionism.

Nothing shows the comparative positions on this issue better than the statements on joint prayer by T. F. Gullixson of the Norwegian Lutheran Church and A. A. Brux of the Missouri Synod. Gullixson had suggested in his paper, "The Fellowship Question," which he presented to the American Lutheran Conference convention, that there might be situations where Lutheran pastors could participate in a worship service with clergymen of other Christian faiths. Not only did the American Lutheran Conference approve this, but President Hein of the American Lutheran Church in 1934 said that Gullixson's paper:

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 101.

... presents the position of the American Lutheran Church in such an excellent manner, that your president suggested to the District President that at the expense of the District a copy be sent to every pastor.⁸⁹

During the same year that Gullixson was presenting his paper, Adolph Brux, a missionary of the Missouri Synod to the Moslems in India, was not allowed to return to India because he had also presented a paper in favor of prayers with other Christians, in this case other Christian missionaries. His paper challenged the position of the Missouri Synod on prayer fellowship, saying that the Bible passages used to support this view were not relevant. On May 16, 1932, the Board of Foreign-Missions of the Missouri Synod passed the following resolution:

Whereas, Missionary A. A. Brux no longer holds and confesses with us that Christians having the pure word of God should not have prayer-fellowship with sectarian Christians, but on the contrary holds and declares that the prayer-fellowship is required of them not only in private, but also in public, e.g. in prayer meetings: Therefore, be it herewith resolved with sincere regrets that we cannot return him as a missionary to India.⁹⁰

This approach by the Missouri Synod was merely a logical conclusion from their premise that Bible passages such as Rom. 16:17 commanded separation in any religious activity from those who did not hold to the same doctrinal

⁸⁹American Lutheran Church. Minutes (1934), p. 21.

⁹⁰Adolph A. Brux, An Appeal to Synod with History of Case, (Racine, Wisc.: By the Author, 1934), pp. 8f.

position in all things. This was not only a different interpretation of this and similar passages from that which theologians from the other Lutheran synods held, but it established a different standard for church fellowship. Whereas the Norwegians and the American Lutheran Church accused the United Lutheran Church of unionism for fraternizing with non-Lutherans, the Missouri Synod accused the American Lutheran Church of unionism because it had official church fellowship with the members of the American Lutheran Conference and did joint work with the National Lutheran Council, the Lutheran World Convention, and all the other organizations mentioned.

The Editors' Symposium

A symposium published in 1932 reflected these various approaches to fellowship. Editors from the United Lutheran Church, the Norwegian Lutheran Church, and the Augustana Synod, and Dr. Walter A. Maier, a professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and the speaker on "The Lutheran Hour," wrote on the topic, "My idea of a United American Lutheran Church."

Nathan Melhorn of the United Lutheran Church said that the only realistic way of achieving a united American Lutheran Church was a gradual flowing together of the various Lutheran bodies. This would result in a new amalgamated synod which would be thoroughly

Americanized, unlike the ethnic synods of the nineteenth century. At the same time, it could capitalize on various contributions each group could make. Fellowship would begin on the parish level but would have to involve larger administrative units to be really effective. He suggested that the best way to organize this new body would be to follow the patterns of the civil government, with local, state, and national levels of administration.

He favored a merger of all Lutheran bodies into one organization. He saw no doctrinal obstacles to such a union. In fact, he said, "It is sin and imperfect faith that retards and restricts the range of harmonious action and reciprocal cooperation by the children of the Father."⁹¹ This was consistent with what the United Lutheran Church had been saying for years.

G. T. Lee of the Norwegian Lutheran Church introduced his remarks with the observation that there had been more mergers and federations accomplished in the Christian Church in his day than at any other time in history, and that Lutherans in America were in the forefront of this movement. He

⁹¹ Nathan R. Melhorn, "My Idea of a United American Lutheran Church A Symposium I," Augustana Quarterly, XI (July, 1932), 197.

believed that the former reasons for separate synods, as valid as they once may have been, had now disappeared.

But how to achieve the desired unity? Lee disagreed with the United Lutheran Church that doctrinal discussions were unnecessary.

Since there is disagreement, it is necessary to come together and try to reach an agreement. This is the Lutheran method. We cannot say: "we do not care for these differences. Let us begin by working together and try to iron out these difficulties afterwards." Representative men from all groups of Lutherans should come together and try to come to a complete understanding.⁹²

That statement "complete understanding" cannot be taken in the same sense that a Missouri Synod man would mean it. Lee said:

It is possible to raise objections and questions regarding every doctrine in the Bible. It is possible to interpret, speculate, philosophize usque ad nauseam and there is no end to the hair-splitting of which the human mind is capable. . . . Not satisfied with a plain and simple statement, it has been considered necessary to make efforts to guard against every conceivable understanding and enter into such infinitesimal distinctions that it is beyond the comprehension, not only of the laity, but it even becomes a puzzle to an expert in Aristotelian logic.⁹³

Thus he took a middle position, between the United Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod. Furthermore, he suggested that if unity in essentials was achieved, it

⁹²G. T. Lee, "My Idea, II," p. 201.

⁹³Ibid., p. 204.

would produce a federation, such as the American Lutheran Conference, rather than a merger, which the United Lutheran Church advocated.

L. G. Abrahamson of the Augustana Synod, the Swedish body that was similar in ideology to the United Lutheran Church but was a member of the American Lutheran Conference, seemed to echo Lee's sentiments. However, there was a difference. He did insist on "absolute adherence to the historic confessions of the Church"⁹⁴ and warned against unionism. But he also said:

It is impossible for me to detect any real doctrinal differences in the three great organizations of our Church, the Synodical Conference, the United Lutheran Church and the American Lutheran Conference.⁹⁵

Furthermore, Abrahamson showed that he had a different approach to church fellowship than the more conservative Norwegians or Germans when he stressed efficiency and duplication of waste as justifications for church unity. He said:

...[Disunity] prevented it [the Lutheran Church] from assuming the leading role among the religious forces in our country that it has been entitled to according to its history, its numerical strength, and its apostolicity.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ L. G. Abrahamson, "My Idea, III," p. 206.

⁹⁵ Ibid. It was this statement that prompted Graebner to go into such detail to document the synodical differences in his Problem of Lutheran Union, p. 4.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 205.

Dr. Maier of the Missouri Synod, on the other hand, took the position that church unity had to be approached gradually. Even before there could be the necessary discussions on doctrine, many things would have to take place. He did not advocate official discussions, but free conferences. With all this in mind, he was not optimistic about unity, since anything less than absolute agreement on all doctrines between two churches would only tend to crush or force out the dissenting minorities. He did deplore the damage done by divisiveness, and the duplication of efforts, but insisted that only complete agreement would justify organizational unity. His article was much more irenic than most Missouri Synod statements, but it clearly showed the Synod's position.

The Laymen Speak Out for Unity

At the same time that all these professional theologians were concerning themselves with the question of closer church unity, sentiment for greater Lutheran cooperation was evident in another sector of the Lutheran Church. The laymen were beginning to speak out on theological and ecclesiastical issues. Lay organizations had been established in 1917 to help deal with the wartime emergency and the Reformation anniversary. By 1930, the Federation of Lutheran Brotherhoods was a sizeable organization.

As its leaders began to express their views, the church leaders began to listen. So in 1933 George Scheid of the American Lutheran Church, Eskil Carlson of the Augustana Synod, and E. Clarence Miller of the United Lutheran Church contributed their ideas on "Lutheran Unity from a Layman's Point of View" in a symposium.

Scheid preferred the establishment of an all-inclusive federation to organic union. He insisted that the reason that the Lutheran churches were not closer together officially was not that they differed in their confessions, but in their application of that confession.

He rejected the two extremes that he saw in American Lutheranism. He did not connect these extremes with specific church bodies, but it was clear who he had in mind.

On the one hand a rigid unecumenical or harsh, technical, and overexact conservatism which recognizes no Lutheranism that is not officially affiliated with it and does not think with it to the smallest detail. On the other hand a shallow or indifferent liberalism which runs into blighting unionism through an indiscriminate pulpit and altar fellowship with groups with whom Lutherans are not one in the faith, and into a religious fellowship, particularly through its clergy, with organizations that are fundamentally anti-Christian. We recognize the two opposite tendencies as extremes within the two bodies where we find them most plainly practiced.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ George Scheid, "A Layman's View on Lutheran Unity, I," Augustana Quarterly, XII (July, 1933), 224. This was reprinted in Lutheran Standard, XC (Sept. 30, 1933), 6f, and in Lutheran Companion, XLI (Oct. 7, 1933), 1262f.

To deal with these two extremes, and yet establish a comprehensive Lutheran fellowship, he suggested a single Lutheran federation that would encompass all Lutheran groups and could recognize and learn from the strengths of all groups.

We must not fight one another but at the same time we dare never be silent toward error. The conservative must seek more of the sweet ecumenical spirit of the liberal, and the liberal must seek more of the confessional conscience of the conservative. Both sides, when they have purged themselves of that which is foreign to Lutheranism, will have something invaluable to contribute to a God-pleasing union.⁹⁸

So Scheid pleaded for Lutheran unity without the extremes of indifferentism or exclusiveness. He felt that some of the clergy were wrong for having "prejudices against unity" but that some of the laity were just as wrong in their "desire for a union at any price."⁹⁹

Carlson, on the other hand, took a more practical approach. The theme of his essay was the sentence: "The layman who pays the bills expects efficiency."¹⁰⁰ The work of the church required maximum efficiency, and the best way to have that would be for the church to be united. Because of this, he believed that the laymen were in favor of Lutheran Union. Although he said that

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 227.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 228.

¹⁰⁰Eskil C. Carlson, "Lutheran Unity, II," p. 231.

the laymen did not want to compromise, his emphasis was that more could be accomplished if the church would stop arguing and unite.

Like Carlson, E. Clarence Miller was preoccupied with efficiency in running the church. This is not very surprising, since he was the treasurer of the United Lutheran Church, and dealt with the business matters of the church all the time. He criticized the clergy, especially those who were church leaders, of individualism, selfishness and disinterest in real church unity. His solution to disunity was not a federation, which he said tended to "postpone real unity rather than encourage it, and the reading of papers on theological issues in dispute is the principal product instead of more intensified operation in calling the world to repentance."¹⁰¹ He favored an actual merger of all Lutheran churches. To this end he urged the laymen to do what they could since he was sure that they were more interested in Lutheran unity than the clergy were.

These opinions of leading laymen paralleled the statements of clergymen in the various church bodies. For an indication of what the laymen of the Missouri Synod thought, it should be noted that although the Missouri Synod lay group, The Lutheran Laymen's League,

¹⁰¹E. Clarence Miller, "The Unity of the Lutheran Church from a Layman's Point of View," Augustana Quarterly, XII (Oct., 1933), 309.

was founded also in 1917, it was not a member of the American Federation of Lutheran Brotherhoods. Moreover, when this latter group had its second convention in 1929, its recurring theme was that there was unity within the Lutheran church, and so there could be union. The Concordia Theological Monthly criticized this attitude, saying it was unionistic, since there was no doctrinal agreement among the synods sufficient for union.¹⁰²

The lay symposium reflected the mood among the laymen outside of the Synodical Conference. The agitation for closer Lutheran relationships behind all the articles about Lutheran union in the Lutheran press was also apparent in the lay organizations. Several local lay groups called for Lutheran unity in 1934. The Lutheran Men's alliance of Southern California, the Lutheran Men's League of Toledo, Ohio, and the Lutheran Men's Association of Chicagoland passed similar resolutions which called for immediate action by the Lutheran church bodies on church unity.

The first group to pass such a resolution was the Southern California group. Noting that all the major synods except the Missouri Synod were represented, and believing that the lay leaders generally believed that the time had

¹⁰²[Theodore] E[ngelder], "Fictitious Unity," Concordia Theological Monthly, I (Feb., 1930), 142,

come for organic union of the American Lutheran Churches, the resolution had three parts. First, it asked the presidents of the various synods to establish a committee to meet in 1934 to seek "a union of all groups by a confederation of synods with the ultimate object of organic union."¹⁰³ Pastors and laymen were to be represented equally on this committee. Secondly, this committee was to form the official board of this new Lutheran church. Thirdly, it was resolved that this resolution not only be sent to the various presidents, but also to the presidents of the denominational laymen's groups, and to the editors of all Lutheran periodicals.

The presupposition behind this resolution was the assertion: "We are not conscious of any doctrinal differences. We believe we are already confessionally united."¹⁰⁴ The motivations behind this action can be seen by the arguments stated in favor of the resolution:

We believe such union will focus the eyes of the world "on Christ the Redeemer." On Luther's gift to the world 400 years ago-- the open Bible. And the Lutherans of 1934 upholding the spotlight on the word of St. Paul, "The just shall live by faith."

¹⁰³"Lutheran Men's Alliance Pass Resolutions," Lutheran Herald, XVIII (April 17, 1934), 363.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

We believe such union will bring concentrated thought and action for spiritual and material gain, such as efficiency and economy of administration; in home and foreign missionary work, the management of institutions, such as old people's homes, hospitals, educational institutions, and publications.

We believe such union will distribute and locate our churches to greater advantage and to promoting better church and Sunday school work.

We believe such union will place the Lutheran church before the public in a better light and with greater influence on the secular press.¹⁰⁵

A few months later, the Toledo Lutheran Men's League met. Frederick Knubel, the president of the United Lutheran Church, and Otto Mees, president of the American Lutheran Conference and a pastor in the American Lutheran Church, spoke favorably at this meeting about the union efforts of the laymen. The group unanimously passed a resolution that a committee be formed "whose duty it should be to call upon the official leaders of the various general Lutheran bodies to bring about the merger of the churches of the American Lutheran Conference and the United Lutheran Church in America."¹⁰⁶

In May the laymen's group in the Chicago area met, and they also passed a resolution about church unity. It was similar to the other lay resolutions, except that it

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ American Lutheran Church. Minutes (1934), p. 22.

did not suggest a specific method for achieving union. This clamor for action on Lutheran unity from the grass roots of the church produced results. First of all, all the major Lutheran periodicals made some editorial comment. Editor Melhorn of The Lutheran of the United Lutheran Church wrote approvingly of the Southern California and Toledo resolutions.¹⁰⁷ This was no surprise. Already in 1932 he had editorially encouraged the laymen to stand against whatever frustrated Lutheran unity.¹⁰⁸ He agreed with the laymen that the divisions in the church were unnecessary and weakened the church.

Editor Lee of the Lutheran Herald of the Norwegian Lutheran Church wrote a lengthy lead editorial on the Southern California resolution, titled "The Demand for a Unified Lutheran Church." He noted the demand and desire for a unified Lutheran Church, and asked, "Why hesitate? Why not bring it about at once? Why hold back? Why block progress and stand in the way for a good cause?"¹⁰⁹ He then answered his own questions by saying that there must be unity in spirit and truth (although he did not say "unity in all doctrines"). Where this unity is present, outward unity will follow. On the other hand, if there is

¹⁰⁷ "The Demand for a Unified Lutheran Church," The Lutheran, XVI (May 10, 1934), 7.

¹⁰⁸ "Lutheran Separatism Threatened," The Lutheran, XIV (Nov. 26, 1931), 12.

¹⁰⁹ "The Demand for a Unified Lutheran Church," Lutheran Herald, XVIII (April 17, 1934), 363.

no unity of faith and spirit, there will always be problems in creating church union. He acknowledged that there was basic agreement between the doctrinal standards of the major Lutheran groups. But he also acknowledged that there were differences not only in matters of church practice, but also in evaluating how these differences affected the confessional integrity of the various groups. He disagreed with the lay resolutions that the need was to have church union; he said that before that happened, there first would have to be mutual fellowship and coordination of activities. Preceding fellowship there must be a discussion of differences.

The American Lutheran Church reacted to the lay resolution in Kirchliche Zeitschrift. It called the demand for church union foolishness.¹¹⁰ Although it recognized that differences could be over-emphasized, it insisted they could not be ignored. It cited differences that would have to be resolved before fellowship could be established, including violations of the Galesburg Rule, and the lodge issue. It concluded its remarks on the lay resolutions by saying, "God preserve us from a burden which some in the name of 'American Lutheranism' want to force upon us."¹¹¹

¹¹⁰"Kirchliche Chronik," Kirchliche Zeitschrift, 58 (Sept., 1934), 571.

¹¹¹Ibid. (Translation by author).

The Missouri Synod also responded to these resolutions. The Lutheran Witness mentioned the calls for unity but said that the only way for church unity was through doctrinal agreement. It said:

Those who demand outward union without this inward unity simply demand that we open Christ's sheepfold to the wolves. Such are not true friends of unity and union as wish to hush the testimony against false doctrine. Whether they are conscious of it or not, the demand for union without regard for purity of teaching is a demand for tolerance for that which destroys the flock of the Good Shepherd.¹¹²

A month later, Theodore Graebner called talk of a single, united Lutheran Church a mirage. He contemptuously said:

We are not interested in a super organization uniting under one head the Yankees and the Canadians, the Pennsylvania Dutch and the Chicago Pomeranians, Russlaender, the old Missouri stock, the Norwegians, Swedes, Danes, Icelanders and Finns--all the old alliances and loyalties cancelled and a union formed as of furniture factories or tobacco plantations, where nothing counts but the reducing of overhead and the increasing dividends. The thing cannot be done, and those who think it can, should have someone reach up with a boat hook and pull their feet back on the ground.¹¹³

This article was reprinted with approval in Kirchliche Zeitschrift and quoted by President Hein in his 1934 convention report.

¹¹²[Martin] S[ommer], "Demand for Lutheran Unity," The Lutheran Witness, LIII (June 5, 1934), 208f.

¹¹³[Theodore] G[raebner], "The Disunited Lutheran Church," The Lutheran Witness, LIII (July 31, 1934), 270.

The Churches Take Action

All of this literary activity and lay interest regarding Lutheran unity brought things to a climax in 1934 and 1935. In the 1934 American Lutheran Church convention Dr. Hein reported on the lay resolutions. He dismissed the call for organic union as an unimportant issue. In fact, he disagreed with those who believed a single large Lutheran church would be the best way to administer the church. Church fellowship was the immediate goal to be worked for. He declared that differences in practice, not doctrine separated the American Lutheran Church and the United Lutheran Church. Even in this area, agreement was increasing. At the same time, Hein insisted:

Before the two church bodies can officially declare pulpit and altar fellowship, they must come to an agreement on these matters which are of vital importance to the life and the work of the church.¹¹⁴

The convention reacted positively to Hein's report. Several districts had petitioned the convention to take up the lay resolutions and establish a committee to negotiate with other Lutheran bodies. The convention authorized the president to appoint such a committee "to confer with those synodical bodies with which we are not in fellowship with the end in view of establishing pulpit

¹¹⁴American Lutheran Church. Minutes (1934), p. 23.

and altar fellowship on the basis of the Minneapolis Theses."¹¹⁵ Furthermore it directed President Hein personally to bring its greetings to the United Lutheran Church convention which was to meet during the next week.

The United Lutheran Church went even further in its response to the lay resolutions. On the first day of its convention it unanimously passed a resolution that since there was a desire for Lutheran unity, since there was a need for united action against anti-Christian forces in the world and against diluted doctrine in other denominations, and since all Lutheran churches held the same confessional position, there should be closer relationships among the Lutheran churches in America. It directed its president to invite the other synods to confer on this issue, and it established a commission, "in which the laity of the church shall be represented,"¹¹⁶ to conduct these discussions.

When the president of the American Lutheran Church, C. C. Hein, spoke to this convention, he was,

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 235. Although no official directive was given, a layman was appointed to the committee.

¹¹⁶ The United Lutheran Church in America. Minutes of the Ninth Biennial Convention (Savannah, Ga., 1934), pp. 415-417.

in the words of an American Lutheran Church editor, "friendly without being spineless, and frank without being tactless."¹¹⁷ He reported on the action his own church had taken, and he acknowledged that he believed there was doctrinal agreement between the two churches, but that the lodge issue, especially in regard to United Lutheran pastors being Masons, and unionism were the obstacles to fellowship.¹¹⁸

After both these two churches had held their conventions, the American Lutheran Conference convened in November, 1934. This convention proved to be anticlimactic. In 1932 it had formed a committee on Fellowship to recommend action in connection with the papers of Gullixson and Boe. It was to make its report at the 1934 convention.

But by the time the Conference met, both the American Lutheran Church and the United Lutheran Church had voted to establish committees to discuss fellowship. So the convention drastically revised the recommendations of its fellowship committee. It totally eliminated all mention of agreement between the three major Lutheran groups, and even eliminated

¹¹⁷[J. A.] D[ell], "Efforts Toward Understanding," The Pastor's Monthly, XII (Dec., 1934), 747.

¹¹⁸Laetsch, "Foreword (concluded)," pp. 87f, disagreed with Hein, and said that there were also false doctrines being taught in the United Lutheran Church.

the statement that the American Lutheran Conference as such was desirous of fellowship with these groups. In effect, it rejected any thought of giving the American Lutheran Conference any power to negotiate. Although it established a new "Commission on Lutheran Cooperative Endeavors," it specified that it was only to "ascertain in what matters and to what extent other Lutheran groups would be willing to cooperate even before complete fellowship is established."¹¹⁹ Instead, it urged its constituent bodies to establish their own fellowship committees. The only part of the original report from its fellowship committee that the Conference left intact was a section condemning unionism. Thus the member bodies took a basically conservative position on fellowship and asserted their own autonomy in dealing with churches outside of the American Lutheran Conference.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹"Minutes of the Second Biennial Convention of the American Lutheran Conference (Des Moines, Iowa, 1934)," Journal of the American Lutheran Conference, II (March, 1937), 65.

¹²⁰This marked the beginning of the end of the dream that the Conference itself would be the federation which would include all Lutheran bodies. Its Commission on Lutheran Cooperative Endeavor formed in 1934 thought that the Conference should give it more authority. This led it to recommend in 1936 that the Conference either give it more power or discharge it. That convention rejected this idea, but finally the 1938 convention discharged this Commission and created a new commission on Lutheran Church unity, whose sole function was to be a study committee on church unity. "Minutes of the Third Biennial Convention of the American Lutheran Conference (Columbus, Ohio, 1936)," Journal of the American Lutheran Conference, II (March, 1937), 85, 91;

The only question to be resolved was whether the Missouri Synod would also participate in these discussions by establishing an official committee. All along, it had insisted on thorough doctrinal discussion in order to determine whether there was true unity and agreement.

But ever since its 1929 convention, its representatives had mainly spoken of free conferences, since at that convention it had resolved that future official discussions with other German synods which merged into the American Lutheran Church be contingent on their fellowship with the Scandinavians in the American Lutheran Conference, and with a resolution of all the unresolved controversies in 1929.¹²¹ If these conditions were maintained, then there was no hope of including the Missouri Synod in the fellowship negotiations.

But things were changing. Even by 1932, changes were evident. Three of the leading theologians who had been active in intersynodical discussions since the turn of the century, Francis Pieper, Frederick Bente, and George Mezger, had died in 1931 and 1932. President Frederick Pfotenhauer was aging noticeably by 1932. There were changes in the makeup and program of the synod

"Minutes of the Fourth Biennial Convention of the American Lutheran Conference (Racine, Wisc., 1938)," Journal of the American Lutheran Conference, IV (July, 1939), 64.

¹²¹The Missouri Synod. Proceedings (1929), p. 131.

occurring at that same time that prompted Carl S. Meyer to use 1932 as the date for the end of the "middle period" in Missouri Synod history. He said:

The period from 1887 to 1932 saw this Church body changed from an immigrant group to a predominantly native-born group, second-and-third generation children of immigrants. In this period the Missouri Synod faced the overwhelming demands of Innere Mission, a characteristic which this period shared with the first period. During this middle period the Synod began her foreign missions. She made the transition from a German to a predominantly English church body. She experienced a trend toward urbanization. She engaged in several struggles for her parochial schools, which she retained and strengthened. She expanded her system of professional preparatory schools. She even saw the beginnings of a gradual centralization of Synodical functions. Doctrinal concerns, a concern for reine Lehre, were still extremely strong, particularly in the face of liberal theology, higher criticisms, theories of evolution, the social Gospel, fundamentalism and dispensationalism. Conversion and election, the "Four Points," open questions, the Scriptures, were major questions in her relations with other Lutheran bodies.¹²²

So the period from 1932 to 1935 was not only a time of transition for the whole Lutheran union movement, it was a time of transition also for the Missouri Synod itself. Its convention in 1935 produced examples of this transition and change. For one thing, John W. Behnken was elected president of the synod. Although he had ties of family and ideology to the more conservative Wisconsin Synod and

¹²²Meyer, "Historical Background, (concluded)", p. 414.

could not be labeled anything but a conservative himself, there was significance in his election. He was the first president of the synod born in America, after eighty-eight years as a denomination and five German-born presidents. His election, then, was a symptom of the Americanization of the synod.

So although there would be a large German language group for many years in the synod, yet in the first convention chaired by Dehnken (1938) the daily minutes in German were omitted, and the President's report in German was omitted in 1941.¹²³

The 1935 convention hinted at other changes to come when it acted on a resolution to study the problems facing the church because of its change from a rural to a more urban church, and because of the changes and problems in the social order. The convention rejected a suggestion to form a committee to study these things. (The synod had no synodical board to deal with aspects of social welfare until 1950). It said that "The ailment of humanity in this new day is the same as it always was, namely, sin, and the cure remains the same, namely, the God-given Gospel of Jesus Christ."¹²⁴ But the problem had been raised for the first time, nevertheless.

¹²³The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States. Proceedings of the Thirty-seventh Regular Convention (St. Louis, 1938), pp. 9, 349.

¹²⁴The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States. Proceedings of the Thirty-sixth Regular Convention (Cleveland, 1935), pp. 134f.

Another indication of change came in the matter of Dr. Adolph Brux's appeal of the Foreign Mission Board's refusal to return him to India. Brux had graduated from the seminary at St. Louis in 1917 and then had continued his studies in Arabic at the University of Chicago, earning his Ph.D. in 1923. He then took a call to the Moslem mission field in India.

When he began his work, he came into contact with other missionaries of other Christian denominations. Because of these contacts, he began to re-evaluate the position of the Missouri Synod on prayer fellowship. He wrote a conference paper on "Christian Prayer and Unionism" which was discussed at several pastoral meetings in India with no final disposition. He was urged to submit it to the synodical Foreign Mission Board, but he waited until his furlough in 1931 to do so.

This began a lengthy, sometimes acrimonious debate on the issue. His paper was reviewed by various committees, subcommittees, and synodical boards. He had written as part of the paper a detailed exegesis of the Bible passages commonly quoted against unionism and prayer fellowship. On the basis of this exegesis, he concluded that although the Bible warned against compromise of the truth, Christians can and should pray together, "when

circumstances and need require it, and when no violation of our confessional position is involved."¹²⁵

However, the various committees judged his paper on his conclusions. On this basis, they would reject it, because these conclusions contradicted the ideas generally held in the Missouri Synod that all kinds of religious activity between people of different denominations was unionistic. This was explicitly stated in the action of the Foreign Mission Board on October 12, 1932:

Since Dr. Brux in his paper on "Prayer-Fellowship: has departed from the accepted Scriptural position of our Synod [emphases added] with respect to prayer with heterodox Christians, as he himself acknowledges, and since our long continued efforts to convince him of the error of his position have been unavailing, Resolved that we cannot return him to the field in India if he does not recede from his position within the time stated in his remarks as given in the Minutes above.¹²⁶

In other words, the accepted position of the Synod was based on a different exegetical interpretation of the various passages. Since the Board considered their interpretation as correct, they regarded Brux's interpretation wrong, and so there was no need to go into a detailed study of the proof for his position which he presented.

¹²⁵BruX, Appeal, p. 10.

¹²⁶Ibid., p. 13, from the Board Minutes, p. 155.

Between 1932 and 1935 the controversy continued. President Pfotenhauer lent his support to the Board's position. Seminary professors wrote articles and presented papers for and against Brux's position. Finally, Brux appealed the decision of the Board to the 1935 Synodical Convention.

The Convention Appeals committee heard both sides, and then approved a report to the convention that clearly showed that the Missouri Synod was able to change. The original committee report was as follows:

Your committee, appointed to study the appeal of Dr. Brux, who served as Missionary to the Mohammedans in India during the years 1923 to 1932, has had a number of meetings with Dr. Brux and also with several other brethren who kindly offered their services to clear up this case of long standing, one of the great issues involved being that of prayer-fellowship. We are happy to report that agreement has been reached on the following statement with respect to prayer-fellowship, which we consider satisfactory:

1. So far as direct Scripture teaching on prayer-fellowship is concerned, there is no passage, so far as we know, that expressly prohibits prayer-fellowship with erring Christians whom we must still regard as members of the universal Christian church.

2. There are, however, passages which prohibit compromise of the truth, indifference to doctrine, unionism, and giving of offense.

3. Hence every kind of prayer-fellowship which involves one of these objectionable features must be avoided.

He states that this has always been his doctrinal position.

Your committee also discussed with Dr. Brux that section of his essay treating of the clarity of Scriptures. As to this, Dr. Brux declared that he in no manner questions the clarity of Scriptures

and is in full agreement with our church's doctrinal position. Furthermore, he states that if there is any passage in his essay which anyone is inclined to interpret as being unscriptural, he is willing to reconstruct such a statement or to withdraw it entirely. [Brux later suggested an addition here: "upon clear and sufficient evidence."]

As for the essay in question, Dr. Brux states that he had never considered the treatise as final, but rather as a contribution for the discussion of the issue.

Therefore we hold that Brother Brux is eligible for the ministry.

Since Dr. Brux has spent so many years in a very special preparation for the work as minister to the Mohammedans, and since he has proven himself especially qualified to bring the gospel to Mohammedan peoples, we recommend to Synod to instruct the Board of Foreign Missions to reinstate him in his chosen work.

The Word of God makes certain statements concerning unionism and prayer-fellowship. In the field of casuistry we are confronted with many situations that cause no little perplexity in our church body. In fact, the matter of Christian prayer-fellowship has become a burning question. The attitudes toward it vary greatly. Some recognize cautiously the limits of Christian fellowship according to their convictions in the light of Scripture; others show themselves sadly indifferent. Others, again, are filled with doubt and uncertainty as to what might be God-pleasing prayer-fellowship and know not at all what they should do. This is indeed a serious situation in our present-day Christian life where we associate with people of other denominations, and where we reach out to gain the unchurched and to convince the erring. In view of this situation, your committee recommends that--as for instance in the case of the lodge question--Synod appoint a committee through its President to guide us all in a thorough study of Scripture as pertaining to prayer-fellowship with a sound application to church practice and Christian life, with the instruction to report at next Synod. Pertinent studies might then be published in the Theological Monthly, Lutheran Witness, and Lutheraner, so that we might gain a uniform practice and our pastors and laity might be able to proceed in this important matter of prayer-fellowship with absolute certainty, unharassed by so much wavering.

Upon acceptance of this report, Dr. Brux withdraws his appeal.¹²⁷

¹²⁷Adolph A. Brux, Re-Appeal to Synod (Chicago: by the author, 1938), pp. 3f.

When President Pfotenhauer read this report, he did not like it, and he asked that it be revised. So the Committee met again, this time without Brux, but with a member of the Foreign Mission Board, Dr. Wm. Arndt, and presented a shorter report to the convention, which it approved. It read:

Your committee, appointed to study the appeal of Dr. A. Brux, who served as missionary to the Mohammedans from 1923 to 1932, had a number of meetings with Dr. Brux and the other parties concerned to clear up this case of long standing. We are happy to state that we have come to a satisfactory conclusion.

Dr. Brux states that he withdraws his appeal and expresses his regret for the publication of any subjective judgments. He withdraws the charge of false doctrine against Synod. As for the essay on Prayer-Fellowship, he states that he had never considered the treatise as final, but merely as a contribution to the discussion of the issue. Dr. Brux states his doctrinal position thus:

Scriptures very plainly prohibit compromise of the truth, indifference to doctrine, unionism and giving of offense, and therefore forbid every kind of prayer-fellowship which involves one of these objectionable features. There are in the domain of casuistry cases where the question whether unionistic prayer-fellowship is involved cannot be answered in advance.

As to the clarity of Scriptures, Dr. Brux declares that he in no manner questions the clarity of Scriptures and is in full agreement with our church's doctrinal position. Furthermore, he states that if there is any passage in his essay which anyone is inclined to interpret as being unscriptural, he is willing to reconstruct such a statement or to withdraw it entirely.

We hold Brother Brux eligible for the ministry.

Since Dr. Brux has spent so many years in very special preparation for the work as missionary to the Mohammedans, and since he has proven himself especially qualified to bring the gospel to Mohammedans, we recommend that he be returned to the field of his former endeavors.

We furthermore recommend that the Pastoral Conference throughout Synod earnestly and diligently study the Scripture passages pertinent to the question of prayer-fellowship.¹²⁸

When this report is interpreted in light of the first version of the report, it is clear that the committee still intended to vindicate Brux, and to say that praying with other Christians is not inherently wrong. However, the report was ambiguous enough for the Board to interpret it the way it wanted to. So in spite of clarifications suggested by Brux at the time, in spite of assurances given by officials that clarifications were not needed since the sense of the report was unchanged, and in spite of the unambiguous statements that prayer-fellowship was a matter of causistry and that Brux was eligible for the ministry and for return to the mission field, the Board still insisted that Brux retract his essay before he could return to India. In fact, it even refused to pay him back salary.¹²⁹

So Brux asked for a special meeting, which was held on November 7, 1935. Presidents Behnken and Pfotenhauer, representatives of the Board, members of the Convention committee, and others attended. Pfotenhauer and the Board insisted that the convention had not settled the issue of

¹²⁸The Missouri Synod. Proceedings (1935), p. 293.

¹²⁹The Missouri Synod. Proceedings (1938), pp. 318-323. Brux. Re-Appeal, pp. 17-33.

Brux' status and that he must recant. There was a great deal of argument over the meaning of words and phrases in the ambiguous second report, but finally the officials of Synod reaffirmed their position from before the 1935 convention, that Brux was teaching false doctrine and therefore should not be paid back salary or be returned to the mission field, unless he retracted what he had said in his essay.

The result of all this was that Brux re-appealed to the 1938 convention, and it re-affirmed the action of the previous convention, directing the Board to pay him back salary.¹³⁰ In spite of all this, the Board did not send him back to India, and he left the ministry of the synod in 1940 to devote himself to private scholarly research.

Nevertheless, his influence on the Missouri Synod would continue. Brux was the first to have successfully challenged the "accepted Scriptural position" on a major teaching. Even more significant, he had done this by questioning the interpretation of the passages that had been used for years in the synod against unionism and prayer-fellowship. It was also significant that he had been driven to his convictions through his contacts with non-Lutheran Christians on the foreign mission field, the place where the ecumenical movement throughout Christendom had found the greatest support.

¹³⁰ The Missouri Synod. Proceedings (1938), pp. 317-324.

So he broke new exegetical ground for the Missouri Synod. Because his appeal and re-appeal involved him in personality clashes with strong-minded men like Pfotenhauer and Dr. Frederick Brandt, the director of the Foreign Mission Board, at a time when any change was viewed as an admission of error, something unthinkable in the Synod, his case was foredoomed to failure. Yet the constituency of the Synod at the 1935 Convention showed that it was more willing to change than were the officials of Synod. So the action of the conventions on the Brux case was the beginning of a change in the attitude towards prayer-fellowship. Brux's exegetical position would be reflected in various official and unofficial documents of the Missouri Synod until finally "The Theology of Fellowship" was adopted in 1967 which in effect repudiated the "traditional" exegesis of the unionism passages and accepted that of Brux.¹³¹

Finally, the way in which the 1935 convention responded to the various invitations from the lay groups and from the American Lutheran Church and the United Lutheran Church to enter into official negotiations through synodical committees showed that there was a new willingness in the Missouri Synod to establish

¹³¹ The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Proceedings of the Forty-seventh Regular Convention (New York, 1967), p. 91. At the same convention, the Synod resolved that "agreement now exists between our Synod and Dr. Brux," p. 221.

closer relations with other churches. The resolution that was adopted which established a standing Committee on Lutheran Church Union did not mention at all the conditions set down on future negotiations in 1929. It merely said that the Missouri Synod was willing "to confer with other Lutheran bodies on problems of Lutheran union with a view towards effecting true unity on the basis of the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions."¹³² In spite of the preconditions attached to future fellowship negotiations by the 1929 Missouri Synod convention, in spite of all the articles from Missouri Synod writers which had taken such a hard line on Lutheran unity, hesitating to call some churches "Lutheran" and urging free conferences instead of official negotiations; in spite of the fact that the other, more liberal synods would be discussing unity among themselves at the same time; the Missouri Synod convention in 1935 voted to name an official negotiating committee, not only to meet with the American Lutheran Church, but also to meet with the United Lutheran Church, something never before attempted. Thus the Missouri Synod placed itself on record that it wished to make a fresh start in intersynodical fellowship discussions, without any restrictions.

¹³²The Missouri Synod. Proceedings (1935), p. 221.

The stage was now set for intersynodical doctrinal discussions. All the Lutheran churches took a stand on these new negotiations. On the theological right, the Wisconsin Synod of the Synodical Conference had rejected the invitation from the United Lutheran Church to join in doctrinal discussion. It stated bluntly that more than the sixteenth-century confessional writings of the Lutheran church were needed to determine whether there was true unity among Lutherans. In view of what it considered the doctrinal indifference in the United Lutheran Church, it did not feel there was any value even in meeting with it. It indicated its hard-line approach by approving the convention essay in 1935, which said:

It would certainly be impossible for us to enter upon any general plan of Lutheran union without first taking up these abandoned efforts and intersynodical agreement at the point where they were dropped.¹³³

In the theological center, the Norwegian Lutheran Church formed a negotiating committee in 1935, and the

¹³³Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States. Proceedings of the Twenty-third Convention (New Ulm, Minn., 1935), p. 41. Theodore Graebner, writing to his brother in 1939, cited the action of the Wisconsin Synod at this convention as the reason why it was not asked to collaborate with the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod in their negotiations which started in 1936. Letter, Theodore Graebner to Martin Graebner, July 21, 1939, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Graebner file. Cf. Letter, F. H. Brunn to W. Arndt and Theodore Engelder, Oct. 31, 1939, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, William Arndt file.

Augustana Synod did so in 1936, but they were both only involved indirectly in the negotiations between the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod.¹³⁴

More important, the three major synods, the United Lutheran Church on the left, the American Lutheran Church in the center, and the Missouri Synod on the right, all established negotiating committees. The Lutheran unity movement seemed to be moving into high gear at last.

¹³⁴The Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod of North America. Minutes of the Seventh-sixth Annual Convention (Rock Island, Ill., 1935), p. 174; The Norwegian Lutheran Church of America. Annual Report of the Twelfth General Convention (Minneapolis, 1936), pp. 31f, 355.

PART II
CHAPTER II

AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE MISSOURI SYNOD AND THE
AMERICAN LUTHERAN CHURCH, 1936-1938

The major Lutheran bodies formed committees in 1935 to discuss church unity. The United Lutheran Church committee was headed by Dr. F. H. Knubel, the first and only president of the church since its inception in 1918, and long a leading figure in inter-Lutheran activities.¹ Other members of this committee were Dr. Charles M. Jacobs of Lutheran Seminary, Philadelphia, who also had been active in earlier inter-Lutheran discussions, and who was a leading American advocate of the "Erlangen School" approach to hermeneutics; Dr. Henry C. Offerman, also of Lutheran Seminary; three parish pastors, Dr. H. H. Bagger, who was president of the Pennsylvania Synod, D. P. H. Krause of Ft. Wayne, Indiana, and Dr. E. F. Eilert, of New York;

¹For a discussion of his contributions to the cause of Lutheran unity, see Dorris A. Flesner, "Frederick H. Knubel: Pioneer in American Lutheran Participation in the Modern Ecumenical Movement," in The Maturing of American Lutheranism, edited by Herbert Neve and Benjamin Johnson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968), pp. 162-181. Cf. Nelson, Lutheranism in North America 1914-1970, pp. 22ff; Wentz, Lutherans in Concert, pp. 25ff. for discussions on this period.

and three laymen, J. K. Jensen of Janesville, Wisconsin, E. Clarence Miller of Philadelphia and treasurer of the church, and E. Rinderknecht, of Toledo, Ohio. The chairman of the Missouri Synod committee was Professor Theodore Engelder of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, who had been chairman of the earlier Missouri Synod Intersynodical committee, and had been a member of the Committee responsible for the Brief Statement, Professor William Arndt of Concordia, who had also been a member of the Intersynodical Committee; Dr. C. F. Brommer, President of Concordia Teachers' College, Seward, Nebraska; and two parish pastors Karl Kretzmann of Orange, New Jersey, and F. H. Brunn of Rockford, Illinois.

The American Lutheran Church formed two committees, one to meet with the United Lutheran Church committee, and the other to meet with the Missouri Synod Committee. The committee for the United Lutheran Church discussions was Dr. C. C. Hein, the first President of the church, a long-time participant in inter-Lutheran activities, and a staunch defender of the conservative position in the American Lutheran Church; Dr. E. Poppen, who would succeed Hein as president; Dr. Michael Reu, the foremost theologian of the American Lutheran Church, from Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa; Dr. J. N. Grabau of Buffalo, N.Y.; Dr. Walter E. Schuette, president of the Eastern District of the church; E. A. Welke, president of the Minnesota

district; Pastor O. J. Wilke of Madison, Wisconsin, and a layman, William Altman, of Columbus, Ohio. The committee, which met with the Missouri Synod group consisted of Dr. Hein and Dr. Reu, along with Dr. P. H. Buehring, the Dean of Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio; and three pastors, J. Lehman, president of the Central District, K. Hoessel, president of the Wisconsin District, and A. G. Bergener, of Detroit.

Since the American Lutheran Church convention of 1934 had merely authorized its president to appoint "a committee" the establishment of two committees reflected the desire of that church to do whatever was possible to find a basis for unity with both the United Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod. Karl Kretzmann correctly assessed the situation when he wrote to Dr. Arndt in 1939:

It seems that the one [committee] for Missouri represented the conservative element in the A. L. C. and the one for the U. L. C. the liberal, with our good friend Reu and, possibly, President Poppen, on the fence.²

This was to create problems in the negotiations between the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod.

²Letter, Karl Kretzmann to William Arndt, April 4, 1939, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

The Discussions Between the American Lutheran
Church and the Missouri Synod

The first meeting of the committees of these two churches convened on February 11, 1936 at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. After a welcome from Dr. Louis Fuerbringer, the president of the seminary, Dr. Theodore Engelder was elected temporary chairman and came as close to an opening prayer as the Missouri Synod position on prayer fellowship would allow. He called on all the participants "to enter the discussion with an earnest prayer to our Heavenly Father for His guidance and blessing."³ The Missouri Synod committee had decided to ask that the other committees not insist on joint opening prayers.⁴ The official request from this committee to the two synodical presidents cited as reasons the convictions of many members of the Missouri Synod and the possible complications in negotiations from the "violent disapproval in our own circles."⁵ This request was granted, although none of the other

³The Intersynodical Committee, Minutes of the first meeting, February 11 and 12, 1936. (Mimeographed) p. 1. (All of the minutes of these meetings are in the Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file, and in the Archives of the American Lutheran Church, Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, Fellowship with the Missouri Synod file.)

⁴The Intersynodical Committee of the Missouri Synod, Minutes of the meeting, held January 3, 1936. (Typewritten)

⁵Letter, William Arndt to C. C. Hein, Jan. 4, 1936, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

committees shared this point of view on prayer fellowship. So right at the beginning of these deliberations this difference in approach to fellowship epitomized the problem that these two churches faced before there could be fellowship.

The first issue settled at this first meeting was what should be used as the basis of discussion. The 1934 American Lutheran Church convention had instructed its committee to have discussions on the basis of the Minneapolis Theses. The convention resolution establishing the Missouri Synod committee had not stipulated any procedure. The members of the committee had no official instructions. But they were agreed that the Minneapolis Theses were not comprehensive enough. Although the old Intersynodical Theses were suggested,⁶ the Missouri Synod Committee finally decided to present the Brief Statement as the basis of discussion. At the first joint meeting, the participants agreed to compare the Minneapolis Theses with the Brief Statement "paragraph by paragraph, doctrine by doctrine."⁷ In addition, they agreed to use the Intersynodical Theses for further comparison.

In this first meeting, the joint committee discussed the paragraphs dealing with the Scriptures, the Lutheran

⁶Letter, Karl Kretzmann to William Arndt, Jan. 28, 1936, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

⁷The Intersynodical Committee, Minutes of the first meeting, p. 2.

Confessions, and Church fellowship, together with the first seven points of the 1920 Chicago Theses which had been incorporated into the Minneapolis Theses.⁸ Both church bodies had similar confessional statements regarding their adherence to the Lutheran Confessions, and so both the Minneapolis Theses and the Brief Statement were similar at this point.

In addition, the committees agreed on the first six points of the Chicago Theses (The work of Christ, the Gospel, absolution, Holy Baptism, justification and faith). They devoted most of their attention to the statement on conversion, since it was part of the issue separating the Missouri Synod and the other synods since the 1880's. Despite the controversies that had swirled around this doctrine during the preceding fifty years, both committees agreed to the statements in the Minneapolis Theses and the Brief Statement, with one small condition, that "somewhere in the Brief Statement the declaration might be added that the grace of God does not work irresistibly."⁹ The Missouri Synod committee was pleased that these old controversies "no longer seem to be obstacles in the way

⁸For a discussion of the origin of these Theses, see Nelson, Lutheranism in North America, pp. 21ff. Cf. Wolf; Documents, pp. 393, 398ff.

⁹The Intersynodical Committee, Minutes of the first meeting, p. 3.

of union between us and the ALC."¹⁰ Thus at this first meeting, the official committees made great progress in ending the predestinarian controversy that had split the synods in the first place.

Despite these important areas of agreement, the committees continued to disagree on two crucial points, namely, Scriptures and Church Fellowship or Unionism. The participants had to continue the discussion on these items at future meetings. Indeed, echoing what had been said by others before, an American Lutheran Church Commissioner said, in regard to a general discussion of the situation at this meeting, "that he thought the chief stumbling block in the path of the establishment of fellowship would be the question of unionism."¹¹ As the meetings progressed, it was increasingly obvious that the problems that kept the two synods apart were less about divergences in doctrine than about different standards for church cooperation and fellowship.

The amount of time spent on discussing the statement on church fellowship was indicative of the importance of this item. The committees discussed not only the statements in the Minneapolis Theses, the Intersynodical Theses,

¹⁰ Letter, Karl Kretzmann to Theodore Engelder and William Arndt, March 22, 1936, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

¹¹ Letter, William Arndt to Carl Nitz, November 21, 1939, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

and the Brief Statement on this subject, but also the 1934 American Lutheran Church resolution on church fellowship and the relation of that body to the National Lutheran Council and the Lutheran World Convention. It was finally decided to have F. H. Brunn of the Missouri Synod prepare a paper entitled, "On what basis is the American Lutheran Church charged with unionism by members of the Missouri Synod?" to be presented at the next meeting.

This second meeting took place at Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa on May 26 and 27, 1936. The two subjects discussed at the meeting were Pastor Brunn's paper, now titled "Unionism," and the statements on the doctrine of the Scriptures. Brunn's paper was typical of the Missouri Synod's approach to the subject. After first noting that the first and foremost object of the Missouri Synod given in its constitution was the "conservation and promotion of the unity of the true faith," Brunn proceeded to justify its non-cooperation with the other Lutheran church bodies. He quoted 1 Tim. 6:3, Matt. 7:15, Rom. 16:17, 2 Thess. 3:6, 1 Tim. 6:5, Titus 3:10, and 2 John 10, 11. Most conservative Lutheran writers in the past had quoted these same passages against compromise of doctrine and indifference to false teaching. Brunn took the "hard-line" Missouri Synod position, saying that they

...must be applied against those who "speak not the same things," and "are not perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment," 1 Cor. 1:10. These admonitions must be applied also against those church bodies who subscribe to the Scriptures and to the Lutheran Confessions, but tolerate those who "teach otherwise and consent not to wholesome words," and permit such to spread their dissenting opinions.¹²

This interpretation was being questioned, not only by the more liberal Lutherans, but also by T. F. Gullixson of the Norwegian Lutheran Church in his "The Fellowship Question,"¹³ by Adolph Brux in his essay "Christian Prayer-Fellowship and Unionism,"¹⁴ and by the American Lutheran Church Commissioners at this second meeting. The official minutes brought out the difference between the two groups. Brunn's paper emphasized that these passages command separation from false teachers and church bodies which tolerate false teachers. The minutes said:

Concerning Matt. 7:15, the Missouri representatives hold that this passage enjoins the avoiding of all false teachers and false doctrines, while

¹²F. H. Brunn, "Unionism" (paper presented at the second meeting of the Intersynodical Committee, Dubuque, Iowa, May 26 and 27, 1936), p. 3.

¹³Gullixson, The Fellowship Question p. 14. Brunn quotes Gullixson where he is favorable to Brunn's position, but ignores this statement which questions whether it was proper to apply these passages in every instance of doctrinal diversity.

¹⁴Adolph A. Brux, Christian Prayer-Fellowship and Unionism (Racine, Wisc.: By the author, 1935), pp. 7-42.

the A.L.C. men warned against generalizing this passage thus and limiting its application to conscious and deliberate deceivers. Rom. 16:17, 18 brought out a similar difference, the A.L.C. men declaring that because of the limitations of v. 18 the injunction in v. 17 could not be applied generally to each and every person who deviates from us in any point of doctrine. On the principle itself there was no essential difference. 2 Thess. 3:6, it was agreed, applies primarily to sins of life, though Missouri claimed that sins of doctrine do come by deduction within the scope of this passage. The A.L.C. representatives throughout the discussion emphasized that the passages must not be generalized.¹⁵

Both Dr. Hein and Dr. Reu of the American Lutheran Church stated explicitly that they opposed pulpit and altar fellowship with "errorists," or even with members of churches that taught false doctrine. The American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod disagreed on how these principles should be applied. The very fact that the American Lutheran Church had fellowship with the churches in the American Lutheran Conference and the Missouri Synod did not was an indication of this disagreement.

The other issue discussed at this second meeting concerned the Scriptures. This doctrine had been mentioned at the first meeting, but it was tabled until later, because the Missouri Synod representatives felt uneasy

¹⁵The Intersynodical Committee. Minutes of the second meeting, May 26 and 27, 1936. (Mimeographed) p. 1.

that the American Lutheran Church committee was unwilling to say that inspiration was a clearly revealed teaching of Scripture.¹⁶

Dr. Reu had been asked to prepare a statement on the Scriptures at the meeting between his committee and the United Lutheran Church committee. It said:

The Bible, i.e. the Canonical books of the Old and New Testament, is not a system of doctrines, still less a code of morals, but rather the history of God's revelation for the salvation of mankind and of man's reaction to this revelation. It preserves for all generations and presents ever anew this revelation of God centering in Christ the Crucified and Risen One. It is itself the Word of God, His permanent revelation, aside from which, until Christ's return in glory, no other supernatural revelation or word of God may be expected. It consists of a number of separate books, written at various times and on various occasions by men who were living, thinking personalities, each endowed by the Creator with an individuality of his own and having his own peculiar style and mode of presentation; however, in consequence of inspiration, i.e., the unique operation of the Holy Spirit (II Tim. 3:16; I Peter 1:11, 12), by which he supplied to the Holy Writers content and fitting word (I Cor. 2:12, 13), The separate books of the Bible constitute one organic whole without contradiction and error (John 10:35). The Holy Spirit why [*sic*: by] whose operation the Bible came into existence as the Word of God, dwells within it. It is therefore, and will remain for all ages until the End, the only source, rule and norm for doctrine and life, the ever fresh and inexhaustible fountain of all comfort

¹⁶ Letter, Karl Kretzmann to Th. Engelder and Wm. Arndt, Mar. 22, 1936. Evidently they were unaware that this same issue had stalled the American Lutheran Church in 1926. Cf. Meuser, Formation, pp. 177ff.

and strength, wisdom and guidance, a means of grace for mankind. (John 5:39; Rom. 1:16).¹⁷

When this statement was presented to the Missouri Synod Commissioners, they declared "that they find in this statement a perfect presentation of their position."¹⁸ It was essentially what later appeared in the American Lutheran Church "Declaration," and with some controversial revisions, in the "Pittsburgh Agreement" between the American Lutheran Church and the United Lutheran Church. As such, it would be the center of a controversy that contributed to the deterioration of relations between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church after 1938, for it contained phrases that opponents of fellowship suspected to be false doctrine.

The third Intersynodical Committee meeting was held on January 4 and 5, 1937 in Chicago. Dr. Hein was ill, and he sent Em. Poppen, the first Vice President of the American Lutheran Church to take his place. The Committee continued discussion of Brunn's paper on Unionism. The Missouri Synod objected to participation in all joint interdenominational services with bodies they believed to be in error, while the American Lutheran Church in its 1934 convention had allowed for certain exceptions.

¹⁷The Intersynodical Committee. Minutes of the second meeting, pp. 2f.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 3.

Furthermore, the Missouri Synod considered it inconsistent for the American Lutheran Church to be in fellowship with the Scandinavian Lutheran bodies, which were much more liberal in the area of inter-church cooperation than the American Lutheran Church was. These things were all mentioned in Brunn's essay. In fact, he specifically criticized the 1934 resolutions of the American Lutheran Church which allowed for leeway and pastoral discretion in participating in civic religious ceremonies or joint Lutheran anniversary services. He insisted that the Bible passages he quoted forbade fellowship and religious cooperation of all kinds with all those who taught incorrectly, without exception. He pointed out that even the Minneapolis Theses seemed to condemn these practices, since it said, "Where the establishment of church fellowship ignores present doctrinal differences or declares them a matter of indifference, there is unionism, pretense of union which does not exist."¹⁹ Of course, the members of the American Lutheran Church committee insisted that there was agreement on the essential, fundamental doctrines, and matters of church cooperation were practical, not doctrinal issues, while the Missouri Synod had heretofore insisted on complete agreement in doctrine and practice before any cooperation could take place.

¹⁹Wolf, Documents, p. 341.

The American Lutheran Church representatives answered Brunn that they were very much aware of the situation in the Scandinavian churches. Dr. Poppen referred to the president's report in the 1936 American Lutheran Church convention which quoted Pres. E. A. Wilke of its Minnesota District to the effect that all of the members of the American Lutheran Conference must "exercise church discipline fearlessly where gross violations of our mutual trust occur."²⁰ But Dr. Poppen also "pointed to the fact that the Scandinavian synods have a different background than the Missouri: they are striving toward a more consistent Lutheran position and need our encouragement in this effort."²¹ So the American Lutheran Church commissioners felt that they could do more good by staying in the American Lutheran Conference and being a positive influence than by getting out. This would become another "rock on which all attempts to get together would come to grief."²²

It was apparent that these matters connected with the question of unionism might endanger the future of the

²⁰American Lutheran Church. Official Minutes of the Fourth Convention (San Antonio, Texas, 1936), p. 7.

²¹The Intersynodical Committee, Minutes of the third meeting, January 4 and 5, 1937 (Mimeographed) p. 1.

²²Letter, William Arndt to John W. Behnken, April 22, 1937, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file. He was quoting one of the members of the American Lutheran Church committee on the matter of its membership in the American Lutheran Conference.

negotiations, so it was agreed that "the further discussions of Unionism and kindred questions be deferred until our doctrinal discussions have been completed."²³ Nevertheless, they continued to discuss the statements on church fellowship in the various documents. All agreed on the abstract principles involved, but they disagreed on how to apply them. The problem was that the Missouri Synod had always insisted that there could be no cooperation with other Lutherans before complete church fellowship was established.

After agreeing on the lodge paragraph in the Minneapolis Theses (there was no comparable paragraph in the Brief Statement or the Intersynodical Theses), all other doctrines were discussed on the basis of these latter two documents. It was apparent even to the American Lutheran Church men that the Minneapolis Theses were not comprehensive enough for the type of discussion that was developing. This placed them in an awkward position. They knew that they could not persuade their church body to establish fellowship on the basis of a Missouri Synod document, the Brief Statement. This would be interpreted as surrender. So by the fifth meeting they had prepared a "summary" of their own which would be known as the "Declaration of the representatives of the American Lutheran Church."

²³The Intersynodical Committee, Minutes of the third meeting, p. 3.

Both Committees approved the section in the Brief Statement on the spiritual priesthood, the public ministry, church and state, and election of grace. However, they discussed the sections dealing with the means of grace and the church at length. The American Lutheran Church representatives insisted that the section on the church should indicate that the church is not only the invisible fellowship of believers, but also the visible congregation gathered around the means of grace, properly administered by properly ordained pastors. The disagreements about ecclesiology between Grabau, Loehe, and Walther were still haunting their followers.²⁴ However, the Missouri Synod Committee said:

If by the phrase, "The Church has a visible side," nothing else is to be said than that without the use of the means of grace the church can neither

²⁴In the Davenport Theses of 1873, the Iowa Synod had said: "Concerning the doctrine of the Church we could not agree with the Synod of Missouri when it declared that the Church in its nature is invisible in the sense that all that belongs to its visibility must be excluded from the definition of its nature. On the other hand, we maintain that the Church is, indeed, chiefly the communion of the Word and the Sacraments, and that in this sense it is at once visible and invisible." Wolf, Documents, p. 210. However, by 1907, the Toledo Theses, produced by both the Iowa and Ohio Synods, said: "The church, in the proper sense of the term, is the communion of true believers which is established and grows through the means of grace. From this it follows: 1) According to its real essence the Church is and remains invisible on this earth. 2) The fellowship of the means of grace is the necessary form of the Church's appearance and the infallible mark of its existence; and in so far the Church is visible," Ibid., p. 216.

come into existence nor continue to exist,
then we do not consider this statement a
false doctrine.²⁵

At the same time, the American Lutheran Church committee agreed that this phraseology was misleading and ill-advised. It continued to press this point, however, and it became another controversial issue after 1938.

The fourth meeting was held on April 2 and 3, 1937, again in Chicago. An important item discussed at this meeting was "Prayer-Fellowship." At the previous meeting, District President J. Lehmann of the American Lutheran Church had asked to have a statement recorded in the minutes regarding his reaction to the refusal by the Missouri Synod committee to join in opening prayer. He said this was giving offence to himself and others in his district.²⁶ At this fourth meeting, Professor Arndt presented a paper outlining the position of the Missouri Synod on prayer fellowship, to be discussed at the next meeting. Arndt was just at that time involved in the ongoing Brux controversy. His paper was printed with the minutes of this fourth meeting. Therefore it appeared within a few months of the publication of his book Christian Prayer, which was as close to an official answer to Brux's challenge to the traditional Missouri Synod exegesis as would ever be

²⁵The Intersynodical Committee, Minutes of the third meeting, p. 3. Cf. the Toledo Theses.

²⁶Ibid., p. 1.

published. Arndt's paper for the Intersynodical Committee and this book were very similar, but there were also differences.²⁷

The Intersynodical committee statement was a summary, while the section on joint prayer in the book was an elaboration of this summary. Much of the material in the committee paper was also included in the book. In both he began with a statement that joint prayer with other Christians is "inculcated by God and given a special promise."²⁸ In both places he stated that a Christian cannot pray with non-Christians. In both places he insisted that adherence to false doctrine was a barrier to prayer fellowship, because God wants us to remain faithful to all God's teachings, and to have fellowship with an errorist would be the same as to have fellowship with a so-called Christian who was living impenitently in some gross sin. He used 2 Thess. 3:6-15 and 1 Cor. 5:11 as proof texts for this statement.²⁹ In both statements

²⁷This book was first presented as a district essay in Oklahoma in May, 1937. In his Re-Appeal Brux reviewed it as an "official statement of Synod with regard to that question" of prayer fellowship. Adolph A. Brux, Re-Appeal, p. 57.

²⁸William Arndt, Christian Prayer, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1937), p. 60; The Intersynodical Committee, Minutes of the fourth meeting, Chicago, April 2 and 3, 1937, (Mimeographed) Exhibit A.

²⁹Brux challenged this exegesis, saying that in both passages social intercourse, not religious fellowship was forbidden. Religious fellowship was to be cut off only after excommunication which Brux said was indicated in 1 Cor. 5:13. Thus these passages had no relevance to whether one Christian could pray with another. Brux, Re-Appeal, pp. 59ff.

he stated that joint prayer with representatives of denominations teaching false doctrine was forbidden by Rom. 16:17, the key passage in the Brux controversy. In both places he furthermore insisted on limiting joint prayer by warning against creating false impressions of non-existent unity or against giving offense or confusion.

However, only in the statement presented to the Intersynodical Committee did he qualify his strictures against praying with errorists. In this paper he said that a Christian must not pray with errorists "as long as they remain in their attitude of opposition with the truth." Furthermore, he concluded his paper as follows:

Altogether different is the question whether I may pray with a brother who through weakness has fallen into some doctrinal error. With him I may and should pray, endeavoring to lead him back to the truth as long as he is not creating divisions and offenses, separating himself from his brethren. Altogether different, too, is the question whether I may pray with those errorists who come to me seeking the truth, wishing to be enlightened, and who are willing to place themselves on the same foundation with me. For the time being, I may and should consider them as weak brethren, Rom. 14:1.³⁰

The closest he came to this kind of casuistic approach to prayer fellowship in his book was a statement in connection with a hypothetical case of a Methodist who seeks the prayers of a Lutheran pastor, but who is indifferent to

³⁰ The Intersynodical Committee, Minutes of the fourth meeting, Exhibit A.

the doctrinal differences. Arndt said that the Lutheran pastor should discuss these differences first. Then he concluded, "Whether the two can ultimately have prayer fellowship will depend on developments in the conversation."³¹

Thus the statement on prayer fellowship introduced at the Intersynodical Committee meeting, which was accepted by it at the fifth meeting as a "general statement of the underlying principles,"³² was much more conciliatory and positive than the statements in Christian Prayer, which was approved for publication within the Missouri Synod. No wonder Dr. Reu wrote to Arndt about his reactions to the negative reviews of Christian Prayer in Kirchenblatt and the Lutheran Standard, saying, "I said to myself: that is not Dr. Arndt's position."³³ For at that time, Reu had only seen Arndt's committee statement and had not read Christian Prayer. Julius Bodensieck, the editor of Kirchenblatt, on the other hand had only seen the book, so he echoed

³¹Arndt, Christian Prayer, p. 64. Brux said of this statement, "By his own admission, then, difference in doctrine that is not faith-destroying need not be a barrier to prayer-fellowship." Brux, Re-Appeal, p. 62.

³²The Intersynodical Committee, Minutes of the fifth meeting, Chicago, Oct. 1 and 2, 1937. (Mimeographed) p. 2.

³³Letter, Michael Reu to William Arndt, March 20, 1938, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

the sentiments of non-Missourian readers of Christian Prayer when he answered Professor Arndt's criticism of his reviews:

I probably have expressed myself too sharply in my short review; it would have been better to have said more positive things about your book. Nevertheless, I still find that the basic position which you have taken was not misunderstood by me. "You have the truth; you know exactly what is the Scriptural doctrine; you stand firmly on the Confessions; and if I do not think as you in all theological points, then you can only pray with me, if I express my willingness to correct my opinion to accord with yours."³⁴

The Missouri Synod would later accuse the American Lutheran Church of duplicity in their attempts to negotiate with the United Lutheran Church and themselves at the same time. However, Arndt's inconsistency on the matter of prayer fellowship was an example of the same tendency by the Missouri Synod, only in this case it was saying one thing to satisfy the conservatives in the Synodical Conference, and saying another thing to find agreement with the American Lutheran Church. So although Arndt believed in 1939 that the Intersynodical committee meeting could open with joint prayer "since the A.L.C. people have now placed themselves as on the same doctrinal platform with us,"³⁵ others in the Missouri Synod Committee, notably Theodore Engelder, believed that this would

³⁴Letter, Julius Bodensieck to William Arndt, April 4, 1938, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

³⁵Letter, William Arndt to H. Kroening, Jan. 19, 1939, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

not be permissible until full church fellowship was established. The official minutes of the seventh meeting on Jan. 2, 1939 said:

It was also agreed not to open our Committee meetings with joint prayer, for although individually the members have come to the conviction that they are really brethren in the faith, they are here in their official capacity, as representatives of their respective church bodies.³⁶

Thereby, the Missouri Synod representatives indicated that they did not agree that joint prayer was always wrong, but they did not want to anger those who did say so. So they used the technicality that there was no official church fellowship as yet as an excuse. This issue did not go away, however, and would be another obstacle to fellowship.

The main doctrinal issues of this fourth meeting all had to do with eschatology and the old issue of "Open Questions." Specifically, the sections of the Brief Statement on the Millenium, the Antichrist, and Open Questions were discussed. These had been the issues that had separated the former Iowa Synod from the other midwestern Synods in the nineteenth century.

The Brief Statement rejected every teaching usually associated with chiliasm, namely, the 1000 year

³⁶The Intersynodical Committee, Minutes of the seventh meeting, Jan. 2 and 3, 1939. (Mimeographed) p. 2.

earthly reign of Christ and the prosperity of the church during this time; the resurrection of martyrs prior to The general resurrection; the general conversion of Jews before the Judgment Day; and it affirmed that the Pope was the Antichrist prophecied in the New Testament. The American Lutheran Committee agreed with the Brief Statement in rejecting the millenium, but it insisted that the resurrection of the martyrs, the conversion of the Jews, and the idea of the Antichrist were all based on the interpretations of New Testament prophecies which might still be fulfilled in ways unforeseen by those holding the Missouri Synod position. They insisted that their church did not officially teach contrary to the position of the Brief Statement, but they indicated that if there were some in the church who did, this should not be divisive of church fellowship. According to the minutes, they said:

The opinion that certain martyrs might be raised to reign with Christ in heaven is not incompatible with the analogy of faith, though it cannot be strictly proved from Scripture (cf. Toledo Theses, V, b).³⁷

The Missouri Synod Committee accepted this stipulation, although it asked Reu to formulate a statement on these items. This action by an official committee of the Missouri

³⁷ The Intersynodical Committee, Minutes of the fourth meeting, p. 1.

Synod showed that changes had taken place over the years. The Toledo Theses mentioned in the minutes were statements prepared by representatives of the former Ohio and Iowa synods in 1907. They were an attempt to obtain agreement on some controverted issues that pulpit and altar fellowship could be established. Although the Iowa Synod accepted them in 1907, the Ohio Synod did not until 1914. By 1930 at the merger of the two bodies with the Buffalo Synod, all those involved in the merger accepted the point of view expressed in these statements. This was why the American Lutheran Church committee proposed that these items of eschatology should not be regarded as divisive of church fellowship. For the Toledo Theses had stated in its section on chiliasm:

This belief of some, that the reign of Christ and His saints referred to Rev. 20 is an event belonging to the future and that the bodily resurrection there spoken of is a physical resurrection of some believers unto eternal life, is indeed not contrary to the analogy of faith, but can no more definitely be proved from Scriptures than can the spiritual interpretation.³⁸

These same Toledo Theses showed that the old issue of open questions had been modified already before 1907. Originally, the Iowa Synod used the term "Open Questions" for ideas not explicitly decided by the Lutheran Confessions. By 1873 in its Davenport Theses, it was shifting

³⁸Wolf, Documents, p. 218.

the emphasis to include only those doctrines not clearly taught in Scriptures as Open Questions. By 1907 in the Toledo Theses, it agreed to the following statement.

- 1) All doctrines clearly and plainly revealed in the Word of God are, by virtue of the divine authority of that Word, dogmatically fixed as true and binding upon the conscience, whether they have been symbolically defined or not.
- 2) There is within the Church of God no authority whatever for departing from any truths clearly revealed by the Scriptures, whether they are considered fundamental or non-fundamental, important or seemingly unimportant.
- 3) Complete agreement in all articles of faith is the indispensable condition of church fellowship. Persistent error in an article of faith always causes division.
- 4) Complete agreement in all non-fundamental doctrines cannot be attained here on earth, but is nevertheless the goal after which to strive.
- 5) Those who oppose the Word of God knowingly, persistently, and stubbornly, even in subordinate points, thereby overthrow the foundation of the faith and must be excluded from church fellowship.³⁹

This fourth meeting of the Intersynodical Committee showed that the Missouri Synod representatives were acknowledging a change in their own position as well. When the Toledo Theses appeared in 1907, the theological journal of the synod at that time, Lehre und Wehre, commented on them in several issues. It called these theses unionistic, and especially criticized the idea that some Biblical doctrines need not be agreed upon before church fellowship.⁴⁰

³⁹Ibid., pp. 217f.

⁴⁰F. B[ente], "Die Toledoer Unionsthesen," Lehre und Wehre, LIII (June, 1907), p. 281.

Furthermore, it quoted with approval from comments in the Theologische Quartalschrift of the Wisconsin Synod which condemned the theses' position on the visibility of the church, the Antichrist, Sunday, chiliasm, and the resurrection of the martyrs, and called the whole thing a compromising accommodation by the Ohio Synod.⁴¹ The 1931 Brief Statement had reiterated this position, but by 1937 the Missouri Synod committee agreed that these same doctrines (with the exception of the item about Sunday as still covered by the Sabbath regulations, which the American Lutheran Church representatives declared was no longer taught among them) were not divisive of church fellowship. So the official minutes of this fourth meeting stated:

In connection with Section 44, the opinion was expressed that a formal statement of the principle that the doctrines of the Church and the Ministry, of Sunday, of Chiliasm, and of Antichrist, are not open questions, would in the light of our discussion no longer appear necessary.⁴²

In other words, the American Lutheran Church representatives no longer used the category "Open Questions,"⁴³ and the Missouri Synod representatives no longer considered it necessary to insist on complete agreement on these items before church fellowship.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 281f.

⁴² This corrected version is found in the Minutes of the fifth meeting, p. 3.

⁴³ Theodore Graebner, "Penitent Jubilee," pp. 5f. This was first mimeographed in 1948.

The fifth meeting took place on October 1 and 2, 1937 in Chicago. It was at this meeting that the "Declaration of the Representatives of the American Lutheran Church" was presented. Dr. Reu had prepared it, and he read it to the entire committee. It was presented at this time as a summary of the results of the deliberations as viewed by the American Lutheran Church committee. In later discussions its concluding statement would be emphasized: that even though the American Lutheran Church representatives generally agreed with the doctrines as presented in the Brief Statement, they felt "it would be well to supplement them in the manner stated above, in part also to emphasize those of its points which seemed essential to us."⁴⁴ William Arndt wrote to President Behnken that the Declaration was written chiefly for their own church, because the committee believed it would be more willing to agree with the Brief Statement "if a few declarations of their own committee are added, even if these are nothing but just a summary of what the Brief Statement contains When with regard to phraseology special wishes were voiced by our men, he [Reu] was very willing to conform to these wishes and made the desired changes."⁴⁵ Thus the committees

⁴⁴The Intersynodical Committee, Minutes of the fifth meeting, p. 5; Wolf, Documents, p. 398.

⁴⁵Letter, William Arndt to John W. Behnken, Oct. 7, 1937, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

regarded the Declaration not as a competing document with the Brief Statement, but as a complementary document in basic agreement with the Missouri Synod position.

The Declaration included the earlier statement on Scriptures and Inspiration by Reu, but it was revised on the request of the Missouri Synod delegation. When it had first been presented at the second meeting in May, 1936, the minutes said: "The Missouri representatives declared that they find in this statement a perfect presentation of their position."⁴⁶ However, when the Declaration was presented in the fifth meeting, the revised section on the Scriptures was recommitted to the American Lutheran Church committee. The statement that was finally approved omitted several phrases that the Missouri Synod group objected to. The first phrase omitted, which said that the Bible "is not a system of doctrine, still less a code of morals," reflected the influence of the Erlangen school of theology on Reu and the American Lutheran Church.⁴⁷ The Missouri Synod committee regarded this as giving the impression of denying that proof-texts for doctrine and morals could legitimately be gleaned from the Bible. The second phrase

⁴⁶The Intersynodical Committee, Minutes of the second meeting, p. 3.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 2; cf. Martin J. Heineken, "Erlangen Theology," Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, editor in chief, Lefferts Loetscher (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1955), I, 391.

which was omitted emphasized the idea that the Bible not only was God's revelation itself, but was "the history of God's revelation for the salvation of mankind." This theme, that the Bible is not only a revelation in itself, but also a record of God's redemptive activity in history (Heilsgeschichte) was a hallmark of the Erlangen school. It was unpopular and suspect among the most conservative Lutheran bodies at this time. So although the Declaration clearly said that the Bible was itself the permanent revelation of God, the Missouri Synod representatives asked that this statement on the Bible as the history of revelations be omitted, for fear that their more conservative colleagues might misunderstand it to be a hiding place for a denial of inspiration.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ In 1904, Frederick Bente of the Missouri Synod wrote about this approach in a very critical way. "Vorwort," Lehre und Wehre, L (Jan., 1904), 14. Yet by 1960 the faculty of Concordia Seminary had adopted a statement which said: "The authors of the Scriptures . . . record what God said and did in and through the historical events as they present them." "A Statement on the Form and Function of the Holy Scriptures," The Lutheran Witness, LXXX (April 4, 1961), 16. (Adopted April 26, 1960). We see here a trend in Lutheran theological thought. What Jacobs, Reu and others in the other Lutheran churches were saying about the Word of God and the Bible in the first forty years of the century was to be echoed in the Missouri Synod in the 1960's. Cf. Nelson Lutheranism, pp. 11, 34 n. 35, 36 n. 71, 84; Martin Franzmann, The Word of the Lord Grows (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), pp. 1f; The Art of Exegesis (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), cassette #1, side 1, in which Franzmann praises the hermeneutical approach of von Hofmann, a leader of the Erlangen School. Opposition to this and related points of view regarding Biblical interpretation are at the heart of the current controversy within the Missouri Synod.

A third part of the earlier statement omitted in the Declaration again reflected the influence of the Erlangen school on Reu. The original statement read: "It preserves for all generations and presents ever anew this revelation of God, centering in Christ the crucified and Risen One."⁴⁹ The Missouri Synod committee rejected this because it might suggest that some items in the Bible only remotely connected with Christ and His salvation would be somehow less inspired. The American Lutheran Church Declaration stated that it dealt with "the points of doctrine . . . concerning which a suspicion of departure from the true doctrine had arisen."⁵⁰ So any statement that might possibly be interpreted as a departure from orthodoxy was eliminated. Indeed when a similar statement appeared in the

⁴⁹The Intersynodical Committee, minutes of the second meeting, pp. 2f. In discussing why he added "culminated" to the statement on Scriptures worked out with the United Lutheran Church, Reu wrote: "In the following sentence I added 'culminated,' in order to express the truth that God revealed himself step by step. The Old Testament gives no full view of God, still less Leviticus and Numbers. The many aspects of God given there are true, but true only as parts of the full truth. All tends to Christ, finding in Him its culmination, in a certain sense its correction, and since He is now come, He is and remains the center. Bengel, Crusius, Hofman, Delitzsch and Dehler did not live in vain. I also follow in their footsteps when in the first sentence I emphasize 'history.'" M. Reu, "Reu's answer to Jacob's second draft," contained in a set of documents sent to the American Lutheran Church members of the Commission on Fellowship with the U.L.C.A. by Em. Poppen, Sept. 1, 1937, Archives of the American Lutheran Church, Fellowship with the U.L.C. file.

⁵⁰Wolf, Documents, p. 394.

Pittsburgh Agreement, the theological journal of the Wisconsin Synod criticized it for this very reason.⁵¹

The other changes merely eliminated redundancies or ambiguities. One statement, however, was significantly repeated. That was the statement that the Bible is the Word of God. This was not added because the Missouri Synod wanted to make sure that the divine origin of Scriptures was mentioned in the paragraph that stressed its human origin, although this may well have been true. The real reason was that Reu and the American Lutheran Church were attempting to keep the statements on Scriptures that they were discussing with the Missouri Synod and the United Lutheran Church as similar as possible.⁵² Reu was working with Charles Jacobs of the United Lutheran Church at this same time on a statement on Inspiration. Reu was insisting in these discussions that this phrase be included in it. Reu maintained that as that statement read without this phrase, it said only that the work of the Spirit produced "one organic whole." The important result of the Spirit's work really was that these human books were the Word of God.⁵³ Thus this

⁵¹ M., "Of Which Christ is the Center," Theologische Quartalschrift, 36 (July, 1939), pp. 217f.

⁵² So for instance, the statement "using at times even various sources at hand" was added from the statement with the United Lutheran Church.

⁵³ Letter, Michael Reu to Charles Jacobs, June 8, 1937, contained in the documents sent by Em. Poppen, Sept. 1, 1937, Poppen file.

statement repeated in the Declaration was added as much in response to the evasiveness of the United Lutheran Church as to the strictness of the Missouri Synod.

The sections in the Declaration on the universal plan of salvation, predestination and conversion, the church, the office of the public administration of the means of grace, and the doctrine of Sunday were approved by the Missouri Synod representatives. The section on the last things presented a problem, because if approved, it would mean a departure from the policy of the Missouri Synod, which had always insisted on agreement on all doctrines. It was a crucial issue, so final approval was delayed until the next meeting, along with the concluding statement.

The statement on predestination and conversion was a milestone in the history of the midwestern German Lutheran churches. As far as the official committees were concerned, the Predestinarian Controversy dating from the 1880's was over. The Intersynodical Theses had come closer to settling the dispute, but they had several flaws, at least as far as the Examining Committee of the Missouri Synod had been concerned. Now the Declaration not only explicitly repudiated the former positions held against the Missouri Synod, but it tried to speak to the objections raised by that Examining Committee. It explicitly stated that:

... the fact that we have come to faith and will finally be saved is due to nothing whatever in ourselves nor to anything whatsoever that we have done or not done, omitted or not omitted, with natural powers or with so-called "Powers of grace bestowed upon us," here in this life, but solely and alone to this eternal election or eternal purpose of God.⁵⁴

This was supposed to end all the arguments about natural and willful resistance that had developed over the years. Even more important, it explicitly stated that this election "did not take place intuitu fidei."⁵⁵ Dr. William Arndt said that this whole statement "stated exactly the doctrine of the Brief Statement."⁵⁶ It was so clear a reversal of the former position of the Ohio and Iowa Synods that Dr. Reu asked the participants to refrain from publishing anything that would give the impression that one side had won.⁵⁷ Clearly the American Lutheran Church commissioners felt that the old controversy was ended, but they knew that it would not help the Lutheran Union movement for the Missouri Synod

⁵⁴Wolf, Documents, p. 395.

⁵⁵Doctrinal Declarations, A Collection of Official Statements on the Doctrinal Position of Various Lutheran Bodies in America (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957), p. 62. Cf. American Lutheran Church. Official minutes of the fifth convention (Sandusky, Ohio, 1938), p. 9; "The Declaration of the Representatives of the American Lutheran Church," Concordia Theological Monthly X (Jan., 1939), p. 50.

⁵⁶Letter, William Arndt to John W. Behnken, Oct. 7, 1937.

⁵⁷Ibid.

to gloat publicly over its victory. Ironically, there would be more opposition to this statement from within the Synodical Conference than from the American Lutheran Church.

The sixth meeting, which was to have been the last, was held on January 3 and 4, 1938 in Chicago. The discussion on unionism was resumed, and it was resolved in a surprising way. Neither side seemed to be concerned about going into detail on what exactly constituted unionism. The American Lutheran Church delegation simply agreed that the Brief Statement on unionism was "a sufficient statement of the principles involved."⁵⁸ There is no record of any Missouri Synod objections to the involvement of the American Lutheran Church in the American Lutheran Conference or the National Lutheran Council, except that part of the "Statement submitted to the Intersynodical Committee . . . by the Representatives of the Missouri Synod" stipulated that there could be no church fellowship between the two bodies until there was doctrinal agreement with the members of the American Lutheran Conference.⁵⁹ At the same time, the issue

⁵⁸The Intersynodical Committee, Minutes of the sixth meeting, p. 1.

⁵⁹There were four sections in this Statement, which were later incorporated into the 1938 Union Resolution of the Missouri Synod. The sections stated: 1. Actual church fellowship depended on the action of the conventions of the two bodies. 2. It also would depend on doctrinal agreement on the basis of the Brief Statement and the Declaration with the members of the American Lutheran Conference. 3. The Missouri Synod served notice that even after 1 and 2 had been accomplished, the members of the Synodical Conference must

of prayer fellowship was not resolved, nor were all the practical ramifications of the principles of unionism enunciated.

At this meeting, the American Lutheran Church committee brought in a revised statement in their Declaration dealing with conversion and election. Instead of a simple statement criticizing attempts to answer the old "cur allii prae alliis" question, and rejecting the intuitu fidei formula, a six-point statement was presented. The six points were:

1. Only when both [universal plan of salvation and eternal election] are maintained with equal emphasis will the full Scripture truth be expressed.
2. According to Scripture the eternal election took place solely by grace, for Christ's sake, and by way of the universal order of salvation, and it is carried out in time in the same manner.
3. When Scripture speaks of this eternal election, it, as a rule, takes its position in time, after men have come to faith, and in presenting this doctrine, Scripture addresses itself only to believers.
4. Whenever Paul speaks of eternal election, he does so with a feeling of unspeakable gratitude for the grace experienced or for the purpose of consoling believers in all manner of tribulation,

give their approval (this was because of an article in its constitution that bound its members to this kind of corporate agreement before any of them could establish fellowship with other bodies). 4. Until church fellowship had been officially established, pastors of both bodies were to meet in local groups to discuss doctrine and practice. The American Lutheran Church representatives agreed to this statement. For the full text, see Proceedings of the 1938 Missouri Synod convention, p. 226.

but in no case implying that God had considered him and the rest of the believers better than the others and had elected them unto faith on that account or that his election is due to a grace of God that exists exclusively for the elect.

5. The eternal election of the believers unto sonship is not founded upon a second, different will of grace but upon the identical universal will which God earnestly entertains regarding all men.

6. Beyond these truths Scripture teaches nothing concerning the relation of the universal plan of salvation to the eternal election. For that reason all attempts to combine the two and thus to explain why some come to faith and salvation and others do not are human constructions, which should be avoided. As such a well-intended but nevertheless human construction we consider the statement of the old dogmaticians, made under peculiar circumstances, when they said that the eternal predestination took place intuitu fidei. It is true, if the term "election in view of preserving faith (intuitu fidei finalis)" is interpreted in this manner only, that God has decreed from eternity to give on Judgment Day--for the sake of the merits of Christ imputed to them--the crown of glory to those whom He himself by His grace has brought to faith and has kept in faith unto the end, then such an interpretation expresses indeed a truth clearly revealed in Scripture. It is also true that the Scripture doctrine of election includes as the final step the glorification of the elect. But Scripture and the Confessions do not say that the eternal election, or predestination unto the adoption of children, took place in view of faith. Hence, for the sake of clarity in doctrinal presentation this terminology should be avoided.⁶⁰

The chief criticism of the 1929 Examining Committee, whose negative report led to the rejection of the Inter-synodical Theses, had to do with the confusion of the universal will of grace and the doctrine of predestination.

⁶⁰ "Declaration," Concordia Theological Monthly, p. 50.

The revision in this Declaration by the American Lutheran Church committee attempted to deal with this criticism. In the controversy on election between the Missouri Synod and the antecedents of the American Lutheran Church, the opponents of the Missouri Synod emphasized the universal plan of salvation and wanted to be sure that any statement on election made clear that God is serious about wanting all men saved. The Missouri Synod emphasized God's election and wanted to make clear that our salvation ultimately depended totally on God, His grace, His acts of redemption, and His election, and not on anything man did. Therefore, the Examining Committee of 1929 felt that the Intersynodical Theses did not separate these two doctrines. It was concerned lest election become merely the realization at the end of time of God's universal will of grace.

Whether this criticism was valid or not, the American Lutheran Church revised Declaration of 1938 took statements from the Intersynodical Theses (the Preamble and Thesis 6 of Section C, "The Doctrine of the Election of grace, or of God's Predestination unto the Adoption of Children and unto salvation." and paragraph 1 of "Declaration Regarding the Phrase 'Intuitu Fidei Finalis'") to demonstrate that they were meeting this criticism without abandoning what they had said in the Intersynodical Theses. However, whereas the Examining Committee had wanted the

two ideas separated, the Declaration said that both needed to be "maintained with equal emphasis."

The Missouri Synod representatives, still were afraid that these statements from the 1929 document, as quoted in the Declaration, confused God's omniscience with His election. So they asked that several sentences be omitted that had originally been included from the Intersynodical Theses in the revised Declaration. The American Lutheran Church representatives complied with this request. The Revised Declaration, as quoted above, was approved by the entire Intersynodical Committee.

On the crucial subject of conversion and election, the American Lutheran Church had obtained statements from the Missouri Synod that God's grace is not irresistible, and that God knew from eternity who would finally be glorified through their persevering faith. The Missouri Synod gained concessions from the American Lutheran Church that salvation was due completely to God's grace, and the omniscience of God was separate from His electing grace. Therefore, "Intuitu fidei" was not a proper way to describe predestination. Thus this revision of the Declaration demonstrated the complete reconciliation of the two official committees on the old controversy over conversion and election.

This left the section in the Declaration on the last things still to be approved. Nothing is specifically

mentioned in the official minutes of the sixth meeting about discussion and approval of this section, although the subject had been held over from the fifth meeting.⁶¹ After discussing it at that time, the Missouri Synod representatives presented it to the St. Louis faculty. At their meeting on December 7, 1937, the faculty approved the idea that the American Lutheran Church positions on the various items relating to the last things were not divisive of church fellowship.⁶² This affirmed the opinion of the Missouri Synod committee expressed in the Intersynodical committee meeting of April 2, 1937. Therefore, in spite of the lack of any mention of this in the minutes, it can be assumed that there was agreement between the two committees on Section VI, "The Last Things," and the closing paragraphs of the Declaration, which requested that the Missouri Synod recognize these divergencies in doctrine as non-divisive. Furthermore, the Missouri Synod "Statement" took for granted that the Brief Statement and the Declaration together would be the basis for any church fellowship. So although at least one of the Missouri Synod committees had wanted the American Lutheran Church to "surrender,"⁶³ the

⁶¹The Intersynodical Committee, Minutes of the fifth meeting, p. 2.

⁶²"Does the Missouri Synod Want Union?" The Lutheran Witness, LXII (May 25, 1943), 177.

⁶³Letter, William Arndt to Karl Kretzmann, Dec. 15, 1937, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file, referring to F. H. Brunn.

full committee's report to the 1938 convention of the Missouri Synod indicated no dissatisfaction with the Declaration or the results of the negotiations, thus indicating that the American Lutheran Church committee had been able to convince its Missouri Synod counterparts that its approach was proper.

This represented a change in the position of the Missouri Synod. Up to this time, it had insisted on complete doctrinal agreement before church fellowship. Now the negotiating committees were agreeing that there were some Biblical ideas on which complete agreement was not necessary for fellowship. Disagreement on this principle in the Missouri Synod and the Synodical Conference would confuse and complicate further negotiations, and finally this would be one of the major reasons for the failure of this effort at Lutheran unity.

The sixth meeting ended on a congenial note. Strong personal relationships had been cemented through two years of negotiations. Mutual trust had developed. Both Dr. Arndt for the Missouri Synod delegation and Dr. Reu for the American Lutheran Church group expressed the sentiments that much had been accomplished and that a fine spirit had prevailed. Both also expressed a pessimism, however, about any quick results, especially from the Missouri Synod. The statement submitted by the Missouri Synod representatives raised several extremely difficult conditions

to be met before there could be church fellowship: Both the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod would have to accept the results of the negotiations, and both the Synodical Conference and the American Lutheran Conference would also have to approve. No one on the committee thought that these things would happen quickly. In spite of that, the members of the two committees believed that the unity that had been discovered in their meetings was significant enough to warrant taking a first step. They considered their assignment satisfactorily completed. So the minutes called this meeting the final meeting. As future events developed, this was not to be the case.

The 1938 Conventions The Missouri Synod

It was now up to the conventions of the two church bodies to act on the recommendations of the Intersynodical Committee. The convention of the Missouri Synod occurred first, in St. Louis from June 15 to 25, 1938.

Since the action to be taken by this convention was extremely important, and there were several points of view on the matter of fellowship with the American Lutheran Church within the Missouri Synod and the Synodical Conference, care was taken to give plenty of time for discussion. The Committee on Doctrinal Matters of the convention, Committee 16, held a special open meeting on June 16.

At this meeting Dr. Engelder and Dr. Arndt spoke for the Committee for Lutheran Union. They stressed several things. 1. The American Lutheran Church committee had declared that they no longer held their old positions on conversion, election, and open questions that had been in controversy in earlier years. 2. They had accepted all of the Brief Statement with the four exceptions noted in their Declaration (tolerance on the interpretation of possible future fulfillment of the Antichrist, the conversion of the Jews, the millenium, and the resurrection of the martyrs). 3. The Missouri Synod committee, after hearing what earlier Missouri theologians had said about these issues, agreed that these ideas were not divisive of church fellowship. 4. The American Lutheran Church committee recognized that its membership in the American Lutheran Conference was an obstacle to fellowship, but it believed that it could influence the other churches in the Conference for good. Therefore the Missouri Synod committee did not insist that they leave the Conference at once. 5. The Missouri Synod committee was not recommending official church fellowship be established, but individually most of them believed doctrinal unity existed between the two churches.

The report of this open meeting of committee 16 indicated that there was some opposition to the report of the Committee on Lutheran Union. Besides the anticipated criticism of Pastor Theodor Hanssen, there were some others

who questioned whether all of the old "false doctrines" had really been abandoned by the American Lutheran Church. Two items were most often challenged; election and open questions. But the members of the synodical committee were able to persuade the members of Committee 16 that these matters had been satisfactorily settled. Doctors Engelder and Arndt were insistent that the American Lutheran Church commissioners were sincere in their repudiation of their former positions. These men had been on the earlier Intersynodical Committee, and their opinions had special weight. Furthermore, Professor Theodore Graebner, the editor of the Lutheran Witness and the author of Problems of Lutheran Union, verified that the old "open questions" idea was no longer held by the American Lutheran Church. He also stated that the synod should not demand further proof of orthodoxy other than what these fellow Christians had said they believed.

In addition to this open meeting, the Committee on Doctrinal Matters had met in numerous sessions for a week before the convention, discussing the report of the Committee on Lutheran Union. It finally unanimously recommended that the convention accept the agreement reached by the Intersynodical Committee as "the doctrinal basis for future church-fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church."⁶⁴

⁶⁴The Missouri Synod, Proceedings, (1938), p. 231. Cf. "Report of Committee No. 16 of the Missouri Synod Convention," Concordia Theological Monthly, X (Jan., 1939), 57.

This official recommendation of Committee 16 became a third document besides the Brief Statement and the Declaration which would play a part in the future negotiations between the two church bodies. It noted several things.

1. It rejoiced that the Declaration showed that agreement had been reached on the teachings formerly disputed, as inspiration, election, and the office of the ministry. To sharpen the significance of this, it quoted Dr. Pieper to the effect that if agreement could be reached on the matters of election and conversion, then this would be a sign of true unity.⁶⁵ 2. It noted the American Lutheran Church request for tolerance on divergent interpretations on the passages related to the doctrine of eschatology. It agreed that these deviations need not be divisive of church fellowship, and it quoted "synodical fathers" who also took this position.⁶⁶ 3. It noted the disagreement on terminology about the visible and the invisible sides of the church. It agreed with the American Lutheran Church that its emphasis on the use of the means of grace as the visible side of the church need not be divisive of church fellowship.

⁶⁵Proceedings, 1938, p. 228.

⁶⁶Ibid. A footnote was added to this by a vote of the convention: "With reference to the term 'synodical fathers': In this and the following paragraphs the synodical fathers are mentioned and quoted. This must not be understood in any way as if we were basing any doctrine on what the synodical fathers teach. We simply mention the fact that they considered some non-fundamental doctrines as not necessarily divisive of church-fellowship." p. 229.

and referred to Dr. Walther's position on this issue in the 1866 Colloquoy with the Buffalo Synod. 4. It noted that the phraseology of the Declaration was often not what the Missouri Synod would use, but it accepted the Declaration. It said that these statements contain the truth as expressed in the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, and it accepted it as the sincere expression of the American Lutheran Church representatives.⁶⁷

Therefore it made the following recommendations:

1. That we raise our grateful hearts and voices to the Triune God, thanking His mercy for the guidance of the Holy Spirit by which the points of agreement have been reached and imploring His further guidance toward the consummation of the efforts to bring about church-fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church, even though we believe that under the most favorable circumstances much time and effort may be required before any union may be reached.
2. That Synod declare that the Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod together with the Declaration of the representatives of the American Lutheran Church and the provisions of this entire report of Committee No. 16 now being read and with Synod's actions thereupon, be regarded as the doctrinal basis for future church-fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church.
3. That in regard to the points of non-fundamental doctrines mentioned in the Declaration of the American Lutheran Church representatives (Anti-Christ, the conversion of the Jews, the physical resurrection of the martyrs, the fulfillment of the thousand years) we endeavor to establish full agreement and that our Committee on Lutheran Union be instructed to devise ways and means of reaching this end.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 231.

4. That in regard to the propriety of speaking of "the visible side of the Church" we ask our Committee on Lutheran Union to work to this end that uniform and Scripturally acceptable terminology and teaching be attained.

5. That, since for true unity we need not only this doctrinal agreement but also agreement in practise, we state with our synodical fathers that according to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessional writings Christian practise must harmonize with Christian doctrine and that, where there is a divergence from Biblical, confessional practise, strenuous efforts must be made to correct such deviation. We refer particularly to the attitude toward the anti-christian lodge, anti-Scriptural pulpit-and altar-fellowship, and all other forms of unionism.

6. That regarding the establishment of church-fellowship between the two bodies on this basis, Synod recognize the following points, which embody and augment the four recommendations of Synod's Committee on Lutheran Union:

- a. The establishing of church-fellowship between the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod will depend on the action taken by each body with reference to the Brief Statement, the Declaration of the representatives of the American Lutheran Church, and the report of this committee as adopted by Synod.
- b. The establishing of church-fellowship between the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod will depend also on the establishing on the part of the American Lutheran Church of doctrinal agreement with those church-bodies with which the American Lutheran Church is in fellowship.
- c. As far as the Missouri Synod is concerned, this whole matter must be submitted for approval to the other synods constituting the Synodical Conference.
- d. Until church-fellowship has been officially established, the pastors of both church-bodies are encouraged to meet in smaller circles wherever and as often as possible in order to discuss both the doctrinal basis for union and the questions of church practise.

7. That, if by the grace of God fellowship can be established, this fact is to be announced officially by the President of Synod. Until then no action is to be taken by any of our pastors or congregations which would overlook the fact that we are not yet united.

8. That for the purposes herein stated we recommend to Synod that the Committee on Lutheran Union be continued.

9. That we express our sincere gratitude to the members of the Committee on Lutheran Union for their diligent, painstaking, and conscientious work and bespeak for them continued divine blessing.⁶⁸

Dr. Walter A. Maier, the Lutheran Hour speaker and a member of Committee 16, made the committee's report. A distinction was made between the acceptance of the documents as a settlement of the past controversies and the establishment of pulpit and altar fellowship. This later was to be determined by what the other church bodies involved did with the resolution above. But it was clearly and firmly maintained that in spite of the statement that "we endeavor to establish full agreement" on the points of non-fundamental doctrine,⁶⁹ nothing more in the way of doctrinal agreement was needed for church fellowship.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 231ff; "Report," pp. 57ff.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ "The Synodical Convention," The Lutheran Witness, LVII (July 12, 1938), 234. This was emphasized in personal correspondence by leaders of the Synod. Letter, Theodore Graebner to Paul Burdorf, June 10, 1941; William Arndt to C. M. Gullerud, Nov. 25, 1938, Concordia Historical Institute, Graebner and Arndt files.

This was a clear change from the previous insistence of the Missouri Synod on complete doctrinal agreement before church fellowship.

The convention discussed this recommendation in three convention sessions, with no time limitations placed on speakers. Even when Pastor T. Hanssen read a lengthy speech, the president of synod ruled against those who objected to the length of his remarks.⁷¹ Some delegates tried to table the issue until 1941 and to continue negotiations with the American Lutheran Church before deciding that there was a basis for church fellowship. These motions were unanimously defeated. The Lutheran Witness reported:

Spokesmen for the committee and delegates expressed the conviction that the report of the committee offers a satisfactory doctrinal basis for fellowship, that it is important that we guard not only against unionism but also against separatism, the wilful refusal to create unnecessary divisions in the Church. Again, it was pointed out that, if the convention fails to adopt the report of the committee, much misunderstanding and confusion will prevail in Lutheran circles. An amendment to restrict the committee simply to future negotiations with the A.L.C. without accepting its report as an adequate basis for fellowship was defeated by a unanimous vote after prolonged discussion, in which Drs. Arndt, Engelder, Hemmeter, and Drunn pointed out that the committee's report made ample provision for extended negotiations before fraternal relations are established. . . . Rev. H. Meyer of Lakewood, Ohio, raised the question whether refusal of Synod to act on the report at this convention would harm the cause of an eventual God-pleasing Lutheran union, in which case he would favor adoption. In answer to this, proponents of the resolution declared that such refusal would mean the

⁷¹Theo. Hanssen, "On Lutheran Peace or Unionism," (Chicago: Schwartzkopf Mimeo Service, 1938), p. 1.

death of the entire proposition of paving the way for fraternal realtions with the American Lutheran Church. Other speakers pointed out evidence of good faith on the part of Dr. Reu and other leaders of the American Lutheran Church in their statements on inspiration and directed attention to the fact that the controversial questions had been under discussion for a long period of years and that the matter was not being hastened. After full opportunity had been given to all to voice their opinion, an amendment to defer action for three years was unanimously rejected.⁷²

Finally, by a rising unanimous vote, the convention adopted the entire recommendation of the Committee on Lutheran Union and the convention committee on Doctrinal Matters.⁷³

The mood of the convention was optimistic and positive. One observer wrote:

All visitors as well as delegates during the closing days of the sessions were impressed by the fairness with which the chairman conducted the hearings on this matter of intense interest. In walking among the delegates before and after sessions, we were impressed by the impatience of the laymen who were

⁷²"Convention," pp. 236f.

⁷³All reports at the time stated that this vote was unanimous, but there were objections to this statement. In a footnote to "Does the Missouri Synod want Union?" the editor said: "In the above we have followed the official reports of eyewitnesses in the Lutheran Witness, the Daily Lutheran Witness issued during the convention, and the Western District Supplement. It was claimed later by some that two or three votes (out of 605 voting delegates present) at one of these meetings were in the negative. The final and decisive vote was taken by rising. One man, a guest without the right to vote, rose when the nays were called for." p. 177.

anxious to cast their ballot in favor of the resolution as it was finally adopted.⁷⁴

Dr. E. J. Friedrich, former professor at Concordia Seminary, who had attended fourteen synodical conventions from 1917 to 1969, said that the 1938 convention was the most outstanding he had attended.⁷⁵

This positive attitude and the action of the convention on the matter of Lutheran unity was especially significant in view of the fact that the convention essay by Professor Paul Schulz of the Springfield seminary faculty made a strong plea that the Missouri Synod, the true visible church on earth, refrain from fellowship with the unionist "who finds it sufficient if the fundamental doctrines are taught."⁷⁶ This statement certainly was not in harmony with the recommendations of Committee 16 or the convention itself. The Missouri Synod seemingly had committed itself to future church fellowship with the American Lutheran Church as soon as matters of church practise could be adjusted. This was no small matter, but the Missouri Synod

⁷⁴ Adolf F. Meyer, "Convention Impressions," American Lutheran, XXI (July, 1938), 6.

⁷⁵ Taped interview in the possession of the author, April, 1972. In this interview, Dr. Friedrich also said that there was great rejoicing on the convention floor when the union resolution was adopted.

⁷⁶ Paul Schulz, "Dr. C. F. W. Walther's Book 'That the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the True Visible Church of God on Earth'" Concordia Theological Monthly, X (Jan., 1939), 35.

no longer was on record that there were doctrinal differences between the two church bodies.

The American Lutheran Church

The convention of the American Lutheran Church met in Sandusky, Ohio from October 14 to 20, 1938. There had been time between the Missouri Synod convention and this convention for the action of the Missouri Synod to be published and discussed in many district conventions of the American Lutheran Church. So the delegates were fully aware of what the Missouri Synod had done. One district, the Eastern, had even passed a resolution to establish pulpit and altar fellowship with both the Missouri Synod and the United Lutheran Church on the basis of the statements approved by the respective committees.⁷⁷

But the convention was deliberate in acting on any fellowship resolutions. The Declaration and the resolutions of the Missouri Synod convention were included in the acting President's report (C. C. Hein was too ill to attend the convention, so Em. Poppen acted as president and was subsequently elected to that office). Committee 1 of the convention presented a resolution based on the Intersynodical committee agreement and the Missouri Synod action with seven points: 1. Thanks are due to God for His

⁷⁷American Lutheran Church, Minutes, (1938), p. 230.

guidance. 2. We accept the Brief Statement and the Declaration "as sufficient doctrinal basis for church fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church."⁷⁸ 3. No more detailed agreement is necessary for church fellowship than this, but "we are willing to continue the negotiations concerning the points" declared non-divisive.⁷⁹ 4. Even though the Missouri Synod is not ready to immediately establish church fellowship on this basis, we hope that there will be more cooperation and less competition in mission work. 5. "That we consider it our duty to try to obtain the official acceptance of the afore-mentioned doctrinal agreement by those church bodies with which we are in fellowship."⁸⁰ 6. We encourage meetings of pastors of both churches in small groups. 7. We pray that God would lead to full fellowship. An eighth point was added by the convention commending the Commission for its work and accepting and ratifying its report with thanks.

This resolution was discussed at great length at four convention sessions. There was some opposition to it. Some delegates believed that the Missouri Synod

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 255.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰"Report of the Commission on Fellowship," p. 2 (mimeographed). Archives of the American Lutheran Church, Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa.

approach as reflected in the Brief Statement was too narrow and rigid. Others were upset with reports from the Missouri Synod convention that the Missouri Synod was saying it had won and the American Lutheran Church had admitted it had been wrong. Still others, like Dr. Gerhardt Lenski and District President Walter E. Schuette, were afraid that acceptance of the resolution would give the impression that the American Lutheran Church was abandoning or repudiating the American Lutheran Conference.

Members of the Commission on Fellowship, especially Dr. Reu and Dr. Buehring, were able to satisfy the concerns of the first two groups. Dr. Reu put his considerable prestige on the line and emphasized over and over again that he was satisfied with the agreement, and that he was convinced that the Holy Spirit had brought it about. He indicated that the committee had been pleasantly surprised by the agreement and the spirit developed with the Missouri Synod committee. He stated his belief that acceptance of the Declaration and the Missouri Synod resolution would be a historically important first step toward Lutheran unity. When asked about the relation between the Brief Statement and the Declaration, he indicated that the one supplemented the other, and therefore the two together formed a sufficient basis for church fellowship.

Dr. Buehring answered those who resented the apparent gloating of the Missouri Synod by insisting that the official

report was what should be examined and acted upon. He also answered the criticisms regarding the Brief Statement by saying that the Missouri Synod committee did not insist on agreement in every exegetical matter, but only asked whether there was agreement in the doctrine presented in it. He indicated that he believed the Brief Statement was a correct statement of Lutheran doctrine.

But the main objection centered around what this resolution would do to the relations of the American Lutheran Church with the American Lutheran Conference. The original committee resolution would have obligated the American Lutheran Church to seek official acceptance of the Brief Statement and the Declaration by the churches in the Conference, which was part of the understanding reflected in the Missouri Synod convention resolution. Despite assurances from members of the commission, especially R  u and Buehring, that the Missouri Synod was not insisting that the American Lutheran Church leave the Conference, there was the fear that those churches with which the American Lutheran Church already had fellowship would regard any rapprochement with the Missouri Synod as an opening wedge to break up the American Lutheran Conference. So President Schuette of the Eastern District proposed the following resolution:

That we accept and ratify the action of our Commission in declaring the Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod, together with the

Declaration of our Commission, sufficient doctrinal basis for church fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church: provided, however, that doctrinally the Declaration of our Commission shall be regarded as interpretative of the Brief Statement; provided also, that such new fellowship shall not be established at the expense of any disavowal of the Minneapolis Theses or of existing fellowship now based thereon.⁸¹

Those for the Committee's resolution argued that this was unnecessary. For one thing, they said that the Declaration itself was to supplement the Brief Statement with those emphases that the American Lutheran Church felt important. Thus it was designed as a commentary on the Brief Statement. For another thing, it was maintained that continued membership in the American Lutheran Conference or the acceptance of the proposed doctrinal agreement by the Conference were problems of practice. Thus, many spoke of the need to take one step at a time. First determine whether the proposed agreement represented a true doctrinal agreement. Then the practical issues, listed under points 5 and 6 of the Missouri Synod resolution, would be taken up in due time. Among these was the matter of the American Lutheran Conference. Only after all these practical difficulties had been settled would there be decisions on pulpit and altar fellowship with the Missouri Synod.

⁸¹ Daily Minutes, ninth session, October 18, 1938 (mimeographed), Archives, American Lutheran Church.

Schuetz's amendment was defeated, but the problem of satisfying both the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Conference remained. Dr. T. F. Gullixson, the chairman of the Conference, was present at the convention, and this made the situation all the more awkward. Finally, another amendment was offered as a substitution for point 5. It read as follows:

That we believe the Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod, viewed in the light of the Declaration of our Commission, is not in contradiction to the Minneapolis Theses, which are the basis of our fellowship in the American Lutheran Conference. We are not willing to give up this membership. However, we are ready to submit the aforementioned doctrinal agreement to the American Lutheran Conference for official approval and acceptance.⁸²

Dr. Reu assured his friends in the Missouri Synod later that this was not to be interpreted that his church would never leave the American Lutheran Conference, but that it meant only that there was no intention of leaving it at the present time.⁸³ Nevertheless, this amendment would be interpreted by some in the Missouri Synod and in the Synodical Conference as an example of vacillation, duplicity, even hypocrisy on the part of the American Lutheran Church.

⁸²American Lutheran Church, Minutes (1938), pp. 255f.

⁸³Letter, Michael Reu to William Arndt, Oct. 25, 1938, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file. This letter is also quoted in a letter from Arndt to the other members of the Missouri Synod committee, C. F. Brommer, F. Brunn, and K. Kretzmann, Nov. 1, 1938.

The fellowship resolution as amended was adopted unanimously. The Kirchenblatt reported:

The many preceding sessions, addresses and statements, and the private conferences lasting late into the night had not been in vain. When the individual points of the Committee's report and some amendments presented by the committee itself came up for approval, it turned out that they were all approved unanimously.⁸⁴

The Two Conventions Compared

Comparing the action of the two conventions, we find that both declared that the Brief Statement, together with the Declaration, were a sufficient basis for church fellowship, although the Missouri Synod added its own convention Resolutions to these two documents and qualified the statement about fellowship to read "future" church fellowship. Both encouraged the pastors of the two churches to meet in small groups. But the American Lutheran Church resolution did not specifically indicate that matters of church practice, including fellowship with other Lutheran churches, had to be adjusted before there could be full fellowship, while the Missouri Synod did. Furthermore, while both agreed to continue negotiations on the "non-divisive" points, the American Lutheran Church clearly stated that "it is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental

⁸⁴"Die Synode in Sandusky," Kirchenblatt, 81 (Nov. 12, 1938), 9.

doctrines."⁸⁵ The Missouri Synod, while acknowledging that these points were non-divisive of church fellowship, also directed its committee to seek full agreement on them.

Nevertheless, the work of negotiations between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church had reached a stage never attained since the split in the Synodical Conference in 1881. Doctrinal agreement sufficient for church fellowship had been established. Despite the hurdles yet to be cleared, there was rejoicing and a spirit of optimism in both church bodies. Unfortunately, the events of the next few years would delay the fulfillment of these hopes for over thirty years, until 1969.

⁸⁵American Lutheran Church, Minutes (1938), p. 255.

PART II
CHAPTER III

THE AGREEMENT FALLS APART--1938-1941

The Agreement, 1938

In 1938, the committees from the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod charged with seeking closer unity between the two churches were able to report success. They had arrived at what they considered a sufficient doctrinal basis for church fellowship.

The American Lutheran Church committee had accepted the Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod as expressing their own position. They asked only two things of the Missouri Synod representatives. In the first place, they asked the Missouri Synod to accept a supplementary document, which they called their Declaration, along with the Brief Statement. This Declaration emphasized certain things which the American Lutheran Church representatives believed their church body would have included had it written the primary document. In some cases this involved statements about doctrines it was discussing with the United Lutheran Church, such as the doctrine of the Scriptures. In these areas, the statements in the Declaration were attempts to create a united front in the negotiations with the two

church bodies. In other cases, the Declaration dealt with doctrines which had been in controversy with the Missouri Synod. These statements were designed to preserve as much of the emphasis of the American Lutheran Church as the Missouri Synod would allow. This was necessary to make the results of the negotiations acceptable to their constituency. One example of this was the section on "The Universal Plan of Salvation, Predestination and Conversion." Secondly, they asked the Missouri Synod to recognize that certain Biblical interpretations, mainly about matters of eschatology, were non-divisive of church fellowship. The American Lutheran Church delegation insisted that these interpretations were not the official position of their church, but since there were some within their fellowship who held alternative interpretations of New Testament prophecies about the last days, the committee wanted to make sure that these varying interpretations of ambiguous passages did not frustrate doctrinal agreement on church fellowship.

The Missouri Synod committee accepted these conditions. Through the years of discussions, it had come to have a respect for and a trust of the American Lutheran Church committee. It had satisfied itself that there was genuine agreement between the two groups. It believed the American Lutheran Church commissioners when they said that their church no longer held the positions on predestination,

conversion, eschatology, and "open questions" which had divided their churches in former generations.

At the same time, there were some in the American Lutheran Church who still felt that the Missouri Synod's approach to predestination was "crypto-Calvinistic." The only hint of this in the official meetings came when the American Lutheran Church committee asked that the Missouri Synod committee state that God's grace was not irresistible. When it complied without hesitation, this seemed to settle the issue. The main concerns of the American Lutheran Church committee centered in the practical issues of unionism, prayer fellowship, etc. These issues, however, were separated from the strictly doctrinal questions, and thus the committees eliminated any obstacle to agreement.

In 1938 the committee presented this doctrinal agreement, involving the Brief Statement and the Declaration, which included the items that would not be divisive of church fellowship, to the Missouri Synod convention. The convention agreed with the judgment of its committee. It voted to accept this arrangement, and to acknowledge doctrinal agreement with the American Lutheran Church sufficient for future church fellowship, even before there would be full agreement on the non-divisive items. This was a historic act, because up to this time the Missouri Synod had always insisted on complete agreement before fellowship could become a reality. It reiterated what its committee

had said, that this agreement would have to be accepted by the other members of the Synodical Conference, and that this agreement would be void unless the fellowship that the American Lutheran Church had with the members of the American Lutheran Conference could be based on a similar doctrinal standard.

It also stipulated in explicit terms that there had to be agreement in matters of church practice before there could be fellowship. The American Lutheran Church committee had agreed to the stipulations regarding the Synodical Conference and the American Lutheran Conference. But by the very nature of the discussions, nothing had been decided on the practical issues of what should be done if a church member was also a lodge member, or what relations with other churches were allowable without full doctrinal agreement. These issues had been brought up but they had been laid aside in order not to jeopardize the accord on doctrinal matters. The Missouri Synod convention said nothing new, but it did clearly state that doctrinal agreement alone was not enough of a basis for church fellowship.

So when the American Lutheran Church met, it had the Brief Statement, the Declaration, and the action of the Missouri Synod for its consideration. It too accepted the findings of its committee with thanks to God for the increased unity between it and the Missouri Synod. At the

same time, just as the Missouri Synod convention had gone beyond its committee in emphasizing its position on matters of practice and polity, so the American Lutheran Church convention changed its committee's report significantly. The committee report had stated, "We consider it our duty to try to obtain official acceptance of the afore-mentioned doctrinal agreement by those church bodies with which we are in fellowship."¹ The convention adopted this statement:

We believe that the Brief Statement viewed in the light of our Declaration is not in contradiction to the Minneapolis Theses which are the basis of our membership in the American Lutheran Conference. We are not willing to give up this membership. However, we are ready to submit the afore-mentioned doctrinal agreement to the other members of the American Lutheran Conference for their official approval and acceptance.²

The convention made this change because "there were those who seemed to fear that the conference would split wide open if we recognized Missouri."³ By making this

¹ This was from the mimeographed report of the Fellowship Commission which was originally presented to the 1938 convention of the American Lutheran Church. Since it was subsequently amended, no printed records of the convention include this report. The author's copy was with a report from K. H. Ehlers to Theodore Graebner about the convention, made on Oct. 18, 1938. Concordia Historical Institute, Graebner file.

² American Lutheran Church. Minutes, 1938, pp. 255f.

³ Letter, Paul H. Buehring to William Arndt, Oct. 21, 1938, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

change, the convention hoped to send the proper signals to both the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Conference, that the American Lutheran Church welcomed closer relations with the Missouri Synod, but not at the expense of strained relations with the American Lutheran Conference.

Nevertheless, a historic breakthrough in inter-Lutheran relations had occurred. The old controversies that had disrupted conservative midwestern German Lutheranism since the 1880's were officially ended. The conventions had shown that the Missouri Synod was still much more conservative and distrustful of interdenominational relations than the American Lutheran Church. But the disagreements between the two bodies were isolated to those related to matters of church practice. Theoretically these things were less important to Lutheran unity than doctrinal issues. So there was optimism and positive feelings among many in both church bodies about eventual church fellowship.

Yet by 1941, the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church were farther apart than in 1938. Old wounds had been reopened; suspicion and judgmental attitudes were apparent on both sides, even among the members of the committees. As Theodore Graebner said:

In 1938 we electrified the religious world with our St. Louis union resolutions. . . . What has happened since may best be described as saying that our Synod's relations to a larger Lutheran fellowship resemble the accelerated motion of a

ten ton truck rolling backwards down the Cimarron Canyon Road in New Mexico with no-one at the wheel.⁴

For when the Missouri Synod held its 1941 convention, the mood was far different from 1938. Those who had urged conciliation with the American Lutheran Church in 1938⁵ were on the defensive in 1941, merely content with preventing recession of the 1938 actions. The 1941 convention did not officially repudiate the 1938 resolutions; this did not take place until 1947. Yet already in 1941, certain actions were taken that clearly showed that the mood in the Missouri Synod had changed.

It was resolved that one document be constructed out of the two accepted in 1938. Prayer fellowship was explicitly added to the items of practice that needed to be resolved. The convention criticized the American Lutheran Church for not seeking doctrinal agreement more vigorously with the other members of the American Lutheran Conference on the basis of the Brief Statement and the Declaration. Most important, it obscured the question of whether the two churches could have fellowship on the basis of less than complete doctrinal agreement. All of this showed that the conservative voices within the Missouri Synod and the Synodical Conference were in the ascendancy. The actions of the 1941 convention were hailed as a victory

⁴Graebner, "For a Penitent Jubilee," p. 5.

for the anti-fellowship forces. Paul Burgdorf said, "Thank God, the Ft. Wayne Resolutions have made provisions which virtually nullify the action of the 1938 convention in St. Louis."⁵ At the same time, the moderates valiantly tried to show that the convention was not really as bad as it seemed.⁶

What had caused this change in three years? What had happened to cause the Missouri Synod to turn away from its conciliatory approach and again take a hard line on relations with other churches? Any differences in doctrine between the two churches would not be enough to explain this situation. There were actually three other factors besides any doctrinal problems that produced this change in climate. 1. The opposition to fellowship with the American Lutheran Church from members of the Missouri Synod and from the Wisconsin and the Norwegian Synods. 2. The desire of the American Lutheran Church to have closer relations with all Lutheran Churches. 3. The difference between the two church bodies in regard to defining and working out the practical implications of unionism. They

⁵ P. H. Burgdorf, "Lest we Forget," The Confessional Lutheran, III (March, 1942), 27.

⁶ For instance, Graebner wrote to August Brunn, "We did not rescind the 1938 Resolutions on Lutheran Union as a whole or in part and we shall continue to negotiate." Letter, Th. Graebner to August Brunn, July 3, 1941, Concordia Historical Institute, Graebner file.

disagreed on how much unanimity was necessary for church relations.

1. The Opposition from Within the Synodical Conference
The Wisconsin Synod

The first factor in causing the change was the outspoken opposition by the other churches of the Synodical Conference to the fellowship resolutions of 1938. Already in July of 1938, J. Brenner, the president of the Wisconsin Synod had appointed a committee. It met on July 13, 1938, between the conventions of the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church, to review the Declaration. Its report showed that there were questions and misgivings about every article in this document.

Certain of these criticisms were more significant than others, because they would be repeated over and over again in conservative circles. For instance, this committee objected to the statement that God "purposes to justify those who have come to faith," because they said this might obscure the doctrine of objective justification. It objected to the toleration of divergent views regarding the New Testament prophecies about the end of the world, because it felt this was more than merely bearing with a weak brother. It was "giving confessional sanction to unscriptural doctrinal views."⁷

⁷Wisconsin Synod Committee, "Summary," Thiensville, Wisconsin, July 14, 1938. (Mimeographed) Concordia Historical Institute, Karl Kretzmann file.

All of the criticisms were colored by several presuppositions on the part of this committee. First of all it judged the Declaration by the principle that all doctrinal statements must be clear and unequivocal, covering all aspects of the question. This ignored the American Lutheran Church Committee's own statement that the Declaration was a supplement to the Brief Statement. Thus it was not designed to be an all-embracing confessional statement, with theses and antitheses. The American Lutheran Church committee had indicated that it could accept the Brief Statement for this kind of document. This distinction between a comprehensive statement of belief and a supplementary document to emphasize certain points was never clearly made by the Wisconsin Synod or any others of those opposed to the fellowship resolution.

The second presupposition was that if the statement did not clearly delineate the limits of its documents in order to safeguard against every possible heretical idea, then one had the right, if not the duty, to question whether these heresies were not camouflaged behind the words of the statement. So the Wisconsin Synod committee's Summary suggested that the statements in the Declaration implied false doctrine, or that it was too vague or should be worded in a different way, or that it differed from a former position of the American Lutheran Church, and therefore a repudiation of the former position

was also needed. All of this illustrated the attitude on the part of the Wisconsin Synod that the words of the American Lutheran Church commissioners could not be trusted or taken at face value. This was to be a common sentiment among the opponents of fellowship.⁸ This pre-supposition led to putting the worst construction on statements of the American Lutheran Church. If any possible way could be found whereby a statement might deceitfully hide a false teaching, then the statement was suspect.⁹ This frame of mind foredoomed any favorable review of the Declaration.

⁸At a conference of Synodical Conference pastors in Marshall, Minn. in April, 1939, Dr. C. F. Brommer, a member of the Missouri Synod Lutheran Union committee, wrote: "The sentiment was that their [i.e. the American Lutheran Church] word could not be trusted. I answered that we had a right and even a duty to thoroughly examine what the A.L.C. said in their Statement, but we ought not judge their motives and heart. If they were altogether untrustworthy, there would be no use of continuing discussions with them. In response they said, according to Scripture, false teachers have a false heart and are deceitful in their dealings with their fellowmen." Letter, C. F. Brommer to Wm. Arndt, April 29, 1939, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

⁹In a paper presented at a district convention of the Wisconsin Synod in June, 1940, Edmund Reim explained the purpose of his committee's "Summary." "These [items in the Declaration mentioned in the "Summary"] were not rejected or discredited by the "Summary," but the tendency of the questions was to show that there were nooks and corners which were still unexplored and where error could [italics in original] still lie hidden." Edmund Reim, "The Strength of Christian Unity," Theologische Quartalschrift, 37 (Oct., 1940), 266.

The official theological journal of the Wisconsin Synod, Theologische Quartalschrift, produced by the faculty at its Thiensville, Wisconsin seminary, then began a strenuous polemic against the union efforts. In the first three quarterly issues of 1939, fifty-eight pages were devoted to articles and editorials critical of the whole fellowship situation. The main objections raised, besides those already mentioned by the committee, were that doctrinal agreement could not be achieved by committee resolutions, that the Brief Statement was wrongly made a secondary document by the Declaration, that the American Lutheran Church was insincere about persuading the members of the American Lutheran Conference to accept their doctrinal position, that the agreement on inspiration between the American Lutheran Church and the United Lutheran Church was unclear on verbal inspiration and the inerrancy of the Bible, thus raising questions about the corresponding statements in the Declaration, and that the toleration of divergent views allowed error the same right as truth in the church. All of these criticisms were presented to show why the 1938 action of the Missouri Synod was ill-¹⁰ advised and incorrect.

These ideas became official when the Wisconsin Synod met in convention in August, 1939. The convention approved

¹⁰"Kirchengeschichtlichen Notizen," Theologische Quartalschrift, 36 (Jan.-July, 1939), 50ff, 140ff, 211ff.

the report of its committee. It criticized all the union developments and urged that a single document be used as the basis for any fellowship. It furthermore affirmed that a continuation of negotiations between the two churches until the American Lutheran Church had clarified its doctrinal position in a way satisfactory to the Wisconsin Synod would be a denial of the truth. In other words, it held that the Missouri Synod should suspend discussions until the American Lutheran Church officially declared that its former teachings and the statements in the agreement with the United Lutheran Church were wrong. Then after these "errors" had been admitted and rectified, discussions could be held to establish doctrinal unity. It regarded the American Lutheran Church to be made up of hardened errorists and false teachers, and thus it should be rebuked, not engaged in discussion.¹¹

The Wisconsin Synod committee met with the Missouri Synod committee on church union in January, 1941. The Wisconsin group agreed to drop its statement that it would be a denial of the truth for union discussions to continue. But it insisted, together with representatives of the

¹¹[Norman] M[adson], "Do the recent Declarations of the A.L.C. warrant the Establishment of Fraternal Relations?" *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 36 (Oct., 1939), 264. He also said that any invocation of the Eighth Commandment against those who criticize the representatives of the American Lutheran Church was out of order, p. 261. This was originally a paper read to a pastoral conference in June, 1939.

Norwegian Lutheran Synod, that the time was ripe for ending the negotiations.¹²

This opposition was reiterated at the 1941 Wisconsin Synod Convention. Despite the fact that the Missouri Synod in its 1941 convention had already accepted the suggestion of the Wisconsin Synod, that a single document should be written instead of the documents of the 1938 resolutions, and despite the fact that the Missouri Synod had called for representation from its sister synods in the Synodical Conference on the joint union committee, this Wisconsin convention was decidedly anti-Missouri. It insisted that the 1941 Missouri Synod convention had slighted the Wisconsin Synod by not taking official note of its 1939 resolution or specifically saying that it must be consulted in future doctrinal discussions.¹³ Not only did the official resolutions criticize the Missouri Synod, but much of the doctrinal essay presented at the convention dealt with what the essayist regarded as the unionistic tendencies of the Missouri Synod.¹⁴ He charged that the Missouri Synod

¹²The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and other states. Proceedings of the thirty-eighth Regular Convention (Ft. Wayne, Ind., 1941), p. 285. See also the Minutes of the Joint meeting of the Committee on Lutheran Union of the Missouri, Norwegian, Slovak, and Wisconsin Synods, Jan. 3 and 4, 1941, p. 2. Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

¹³The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and other States. Proceedings of the twenty-sixth convention (Saginaw, Mich., 1941), p. 75.

¹⁴The essay was in two parts. The first, an exegetical study of Romans 16:17-18, was published. W. Schumann,

should never have accepted the invitation to have discussions in 1935 in the first place. For once it began to meet these other churches, it was infected with their attitude of "union at any cost." On the whole, the convention was so dominated by criticism of the Missouri Synod, that according to one observer, without Missouri's resolutions of 1941 to attack, the Wisconsin Synod convention program "would have been sorely depleted."¹⁵

Part of the explanation for these attacks was that the Wisconsin Synod was even more conservative than the Missouri Synod. But this in itself does not completely explain the situation. The Wisconsin Synod had a jealousy toward the Missouri Synod.¹⁶ It always had had to live

"Romans 16:17-18," *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 38 (Oct., 1941) 260-272. The second part, meant to be the application, turned out to be an indictment of the Missouri Synod. This was not published. However, two Missouri Synod representatives submitted confidential reports to President John Behnken in which this second part was described. Letter, Wm. Arndt to John W. Behnken, Aug. 14, 1941; "Confidential Report to Dr. Behnken on reactions to the report of the Committee on Union Matters of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin," Fred E. Mayer to John Behnken, p. 3. Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

¹⁵ This statement appears in the "confidential report to the Lutheran Witness" section of the typed report on the convention that Pastor Lawrence Weber sent to Theodore Graebner. It is in the Concordia Historical Institute, Graebner file.

¹⁶ Pastor E. J. A. Marxhausen, a member of the Wisconsin Synod, said, "I have long gained the firm conviction that back of all this knifing was nothing else by plain green-eyed jealousy which lately has nourished a superiority complex." Letter, E. J. A. Marxhausen to Theodore Graebner, Dec. 9, 1939,

in the shadow of its larger sister synod. So its leadership made a point to find ways in which it could appear in a favorable light in comparison with the Missouri Synod. It could not excel in size or influence, but it could excel in its zeal in preserving Lutheran orthodoxy. When it first joined the Synodical Conference, it was regarded as something less than totally orthodox, since it had been a member of the General Council. Now it could demonstrate that it was more pure in doctrine than the Missouri Synod, and this is exactly what it tried to do.

One example of this tendency was that at its 1941 convention, the successes of the Missouri Synod in its radio ministry and its numerical growth were objects of criticism.¹⁷ Another example was that over and over again the Wisconsin Synod complained that the Missouri Synod had not consulted it before taking any action. It must have known that the Missouri Synod would do what it pleased. But its jealousy and feelings of inferiority prompted it

Concordia Historical Institute, Graebner file. Reim also said, "We who have long been one of the lesser churches of the land have in many cases been chafing under a sense of inferiority, starved for a greater measure of recognition. We would like to be great." "The Strength of Christian Unity," p. 263.

¹⁷ Fred Mayer, "Confidential Report," pp. 1f.

to try to have an influence out of proportion to its size.¹⁸

Another thing that helps to explain the Wisconsin Synod's opposition to the Lutheran unity efforts was its understanding of the doctrine of the church. While the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church had certain differences in some doctrines, it is also true that the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod were not in complete agreement either. A controversy about the status of church organizations had gone on at least since 1916.

The Wisconsin Synod taught that synods are just as divinely ordained as local congregations, and so have all the rights and privileges given to the church by Christ. This included the power of excommunication. The Missouri Synod, with its emphasis on the autonomy of the local congregation handed down from the days of the Altenburg Debate and the drafting of its constitution, insisted that

¹⁸It is true that the 1936 convention of the Missouri Synod had stipulated that the Committee on Lutheran Union keep the members of the Synodical Conference informed. At first, the committee had resolved to notify these churches of their Intersynodical Committee meetings, so they might participate. "Minutes of the meeting of the Intersynodical Committee of the Missouri Synod," held Jan. 2, 1936, Concordia Historical Institute, Karl Kretzmann file. But Dr. Arndt decided to delay this until it had been discussed with the American Lutheran Church committee. Letter, Wm. Arndt to F. H. Brunn, Jan. 30, 1936, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file. However, there is nothing in the minutes of the joint meetings to indicate that this was ever brought up. Later, the Wisconsin and Norwegian synods complained about this failure to include them. But both these bodies had officially declined to meet with other churches until there was greater evidence of unity.

although there was nothing forbidden in the Bible about establishing a church body, it could not carry out the Biblical functions belonging to the church.

So in 1932 a joint faculty committee from the two synods drafted a statement designed to resolve the difficulty.¹⁹ But this statement did not settle the issue. Therefore, at the same time that the Wisconsin Synod was criticizing the Missouri Synod for allowing differences on some Biblical ideas to be non-divisive of church fellowship, this disagreement on the doctrine of the church was tacitly allowed to stand without destroying the official church relations between these two bodies in the Synodical Conference. Furthermore, this controversy concerned a much more important idea than those called "non-divisive" in 1938.²⁰

¹⁹"Saetze angenommen am 16. April 1932 in Thiensville, Wisconsin, von der Fakultät des dortigen Seminars und Vertretern der St. Louiser Fakultät und den Praesides der Synoden von Wisconsin und Missouri." Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file. This controversy has never been resolved. The Missouri Synod's understanding of the 1932 agreement was challenged by M. P. Meyer at a Synodical Conference editors' meeting on Sept. 22, 1944. Even after the Synodical Conference dissolved, the controversy over the authority of a synod continued. As recently as January, 1972 it was an obstacle to fellowship between the Federation of Authentic Lutheran (an ultra-conservative splinter group from the Missouri Synod) and the Wisconsin Synod. Paul C. Neipp, "Are FAL and WELS Ready for a God-pleasing Fellowship?" Through to Victory, XII (Jan., 1972), 2f.

²⁰Letter, Theo. Graebner to H. Hamann, June 21, 1943, Concordia Historical Institute, Graebner file. In this letter, Graebner said; "There is nothing between us [the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church] as serious as the differences between the Wisconsin Synod and ourselves."

The Wisconsin Synod explained this inconsistency by saying that there was a difference between toleration toward differences in doctrine of those with whom fellowship exists, and of those seeking fellowship.²¹

This disagreement not only served to aggravate the strained relations between these two churches, but it also helps to explain why the Wisconsin Synod took the approach it did about church fellowship. According to it, a synod was responsible for all of the doctrinal aberrations of its members. Conversely, a member of a church body shared in any doctrinal guilt of his synod. This is why the Wisconsin Synod could use Titus 3:10 against the whole American Lutheran Church. Since it had been admonished by the Wisconsin Synod and others on various occasions, and had not heeded these admonitions, then all of their representatives should be shunned, and in effect, excommunicated. This was why the Wisconsin Synod insisted that the Missouri Synod was sinning by continuing to negotiate with a church body which had not heeded disciplinary words from another church body.²²

²¹M. Lehniger, "The Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod and the Declaration of the A. L. C. as the Doctrinal Basis for Church-Fellowship," Theologische Quartalschrift, 36 (April, 1939), 95f.

²²Indeed, at its 1941 convention, the Wisconsin Synod almost applied Matthew 7:6, "don't cast your pearls before the swine," to the American Lutheran Church. It was omitted only after the Missouri Synod representatives pleaded with the convention. Letter, William Arndt to John W. Behnken, Aug. 14, 1941, p. 2.

The Norwegian Lutheran Synod

Another member of the Synodical Conference, the Norwegian Lutheran Synod (now called the Evangelical Lutheran Synod) also criticized the 1938 union resolutions. It not only pointed out the same objections as the Wisconsin Synod, but they also added several significant emphases of their own to the argument.

One criticism had to do with the procedure used to establish doctrinal agreement. The Norwegian Synod objected to committees working out union documents as the basis for unity. It insisted that the church bodies in question first must give "each other evidence of an existing unity in spirit, and it remains merely to establish the fact of such unity and to arrange for some public recognition and confession of that fact."²³

This aversion to committee negotiations was a common theme of these Norwegians. The vehemence behind this argument seems inappropriate until the history of their church body is taken into consideration. After the split in the Norwegian Lutheran Church as a result of the predestinarian controversy in the Synodical Conference,

²³ Union, Unity, and Unionism [a report from the 1936 Convention Report of the Norwegian Synod] (Mankato, Minn.: Lutheran Synod Book Co., Bethany College, 1939), p. 5. This was a set of theses and essays on church fellowship critical of the negotiations between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church. It was printed and mailed to all the Missouri Synod pastors in 1939 without asking for or receiving permission to do so.

attempts were made for many years to reunite all Norwegian Lutherans. The method used to do this from 1905 to 1917 was through committee discussions. As a result of these committees, the "Opgjoer" or Madison Agreement appeared, which placed the two rival interpretations of predestination side by side, in effect allowing both.²⁴

Generally this agreement was hailed as a God-pleasing breakthrough in Lutheran unity among the Norwegians. However, a minority objected to what they considered compromising unionism. Finally a clarifying document, the Austin Agreement, was acceptable to most of this minority, and even the Concordia Seminary faculty of St. Louis approved it.²⁵ But a group in the minority party rejected it and formed the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, which joined the Synodical Conference in 1920.

From that time on, these Norwegians distrusted any unity arrangement resulting from committee resolutions. Of the Norwegian merger based on such a procedure, one wrote;

²⁴Wolf, Documents, pp. 232ff.

²⁵S. C. Ylvisaker, "The Missouri Synod and the Norwegians, in Ebenezer, pp. 274f. N. M. Ylvisaker said that he had told President Behnken some hitherto unrevealed facts about the situation at the time of the Norwegian split in 1917 which would put the Norwegian Lutheran Church in a more favorable light. There is no record that Behnken ever brought this up at the meetings with the Norwegian Lutheran Synod. Letter, N. M. Ylvisaker to P. E. Kretzmann, Nov. 16, 1936, Concordia Historical Institute, K. Kretzmann file.

A wave of enthusiasm swept over the congregations of the conferring bodies. Little or no effort was made to put the new theses to a real test. The rank and file of the people simply refused to discuss them. They were satisfied with the assurance which the authors of "Opgjoer" gave them that a real settlement of the Election controversy had been effected. And it is to be feared that history will always repeat itself in this respect under similar circumstances.²⁶

They saw an alarming parallel between the committee-initiated merger of the Norwegians in 1917 and the committee action that culminated in the resolutions of 1938. The earlier situation had produced, in their minds, an inadequate basis for union. Furthermore, oral explanations given at the time by committee members which satisfied most of the Norwegians were never put into writing or adopted as official clarifications. The Norwegian Synod believed that these same things were happening in the current fellowship situation. This helps explain their almost paranoid fear of anything worked out by committees.

The other recurring theme of the Norwegian objections to the closer relations between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church also stemmed from their experiences with "Opgjoer," or the Madison Agreement of 1912. Because of their history, they concluded that any church that had fellowship with the other Norwegian body through the American Lutheran Conference must of necessity be unionistic itself.

²⁶ Union, Unity, and Unionism, p. 28.

The mood of the Norwegian Synod can be clearly seen in the minutes of the meeting between their representatives and a committee of the Missouri Synod in February, 1939. The two groups decided to study the Declaration to see whether it contained false doctrine. On the very first article, on Scriptures and Inspiration, the minutes read:

The Norwegian brethren objected to point b. as non-scriptural (Molstad), though it could not be misunderstood if it had been written by Missourians; but the A.L.C. men could not be trusted, because there is reason to believe that they wanted to satisfy also their affiliates (the Norwegian "Merger" and the Augustana Synod).²⁷

No serious false doctrine seems to have been found. The Norwegians conceded that election intuitu fidei was clearly rejected. The main objections they made were based on suspicions about ambiguous statements, and the Missouri Synod committee said that "partly they had been cleared up by recent discussions with the A. L. C. committee or will be adjusted through forthcoming explanations."²⁸ Yet, beginning in the March, 1939 issue of the Lutheran Sentinel, the Norwegian Synod's magazine, J. E. Thoen, a member of their committee, wrote a twelve

²⁷"Minutes of the Conference of the Representatives of the Venerable Norwegian Synod and the Committee on Lutheran Union of the Synod of Missouri, at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Feb. 16-17, 1938," p. 1. Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

²⁸Letter, William Arndt to S. C. Ylvisaker, March 2, 1939, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

part article on "The Present Union Movement among Lutherans" in which he vigorously criticized the action of the Missouri Synod.

Thoen repeated the now-familiar arguments concerning the weaknesses of having two documents, of basing the agreement on committee discussions, of allowing the agreement on committee discussions, of allowing leeway on "non-fundamentals." He mentioned all the possible hiding places for heresy in the Declaration. Finally, in the last four installments, he concentrated on the premise that since the American Lutheran Church was a member of the American Lutheran Conference, and had resolved in its 1938 convention that it was not willing to give up that membership, then whatever it said in the Declaration must reflect a unionistic approach to doctrine. He said:

It is well known that constituent churches of the American Lutheran Conference deny and ridicule the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Bible, teach election in view of faith, and explain the mystery of election and conversion by self-determination and a better conduct. Since the American Lutheran Church is unwilling to give up its affiliation with these churches, it is evident that it is willing to tolerate divergence of doctrine also in the fundamental doctrines treated in this paragraph of the Declaration.²⁹

Regarding the statement on Election in the Declaration, Thoen interpreted it according to a statement from the old Anti-Missourian Brotherhood which linked the universal plan

²⁹J. E. Thoen, "The Present Union Movement Among Lutherans, IX," Lutheran Sentinel, 22 (Sept. 27, 1939), 286.

of salvation and election together.³⁰ He did this in spite of the fact that the Declaration distinguished between the universal plan of salvation and predestination, and the Norwegian committee had not found anything wrong in the formulation at this point in the Declaration. Thoen's line of argument was that since the American Lutheran Church was affiliated with those Norwegians which he held taught a false doctrine of election, therefore the American Lutheran Church's doctrine must also be false.

Again, when the Declaration said that according to Phil. 2:12 even elect Christians must work out their salvation with fear and trembling, Thoen took issue with this. He thought he detected a hiding place for improper revivalism, since the old Hauge Synod used revival techniques extensively. He said:

When we consider the revivalistic teachings and practices of churches with which the American Lutheran Church wants to continue its affiliations, we are obliged to take it in the above-named sense if such churches are not to be excluded from recognition as brethren in faith.³¹

With all this in mind, it is easier to understand the report of S. C. Ylvisaker to the union Committees of the Missouri and Norwegian synods in January, 1940. He said:

³⁰Thoen, "Union Movement, X," Lutheran Sentinel, 22 (Oct. 12, 1939), 301.

³¹Thoen, "Union Movement, X," Lutheran Sentinel, 22 (Nov. 13, 1939), 330.

The theses [on "Unity, Union, and Unionism" approved by the Norwegians in 1938 and distributed to all Missouri Synod pastors in 1939] argued that it was neither wise nor right in the case of church bodies which had been in serious doctrinal disagreement to seek to establish agreement through committees meeting in closed sessions. We were convinced that this was one of the wholesome lessons our synod had learned from our experiences of 1912-1917, and that this lesson was a contribution which we could make toward the guarding of the truth in the Synodical Conference. Our honest attempt at warning the brethren went unheeded so far as the Missouri Synod was concerned, and instead your synod resolved to go that very way in another attempt at agreement with the American Lutheran Church. You of the Missouri Synod can not blame us for feeling the smart of this apparent disregard of our good intentions. Nor can we be blamed greatly for feeling the slight in the next step of these negotiations, the announcement to the world, without any further consultation with us, your brethren, of final doctrinal agreement with the same American Lutheran Church: for, after all, this synod had for many years been in league with those who had opposed our synod on doctrinal grounds. These were the facts as they presented themselves to us, who had had no part in the deliberations.³²

Thus the Norwegian criticisms were influenced by their own experiences and their animosity towards the other Norwegian Lutheran bodies with which the American Lutheran Church had fellowship through the American Lutheran Conference.³³

³²S. C. Ylvisaker, "At Meeting of Union Committees (Missouri Synod and Norwegian Synod) Chicago, Jan. 12 and 13, 1940," pp. 1f. Concordia Historical Institute Arndt file.

³³This was noted by members of the Missouri Synod who were involved in these matters. For instance, Karl Kretzmann said, "They [the Norwegians] must drop their martyr complex

The Wisconsin and Norwegian synods carried their opposition to the 1938 resolutions to the Synodical Conference conventions. Already in the 1938 convention these churches attempted to stall the implementation of any fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church.³⁴ The Conference constitution stipulated that any widening of fellowship relations by any member must be approved by the other members. At the 1938 Conference convention, a revision of the whole constitution was being considered. In an attempt to make it even more difficult for the Missouri Synod to establish any other fellowship relations, these two synods supported an article which created a special committee with equal representation from every member body which was to keep itself informed on "the doctrinal position of the various Lutheran bodies and to report to the Synodical Conference . . . whatever developments it may deem important."³⁵ It was

and quit viewing everything in the light of their 'experience,' and learn to see things objectively and take Christian men at their word. If they insist on keeping the Eighth Commandment suspended indefinitely, I would be in favor of not meeting with them again." Letter, Karl Kretzmann to Wm. Arndt, Feb. 23, 1939, Concordia Historical Institute, Karl Kretzmann file.

³⁴ Letter, John W. Behnken to Karl Kretzmann, July 29, 1938, Concordia Historical Institute, K. Kretzmann file.

³⁵ Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. Proceedings of the thirty-sixth Convention (Watertown, Wisc., 1938), p. 132.

also to be the channel through which any overture for fellowship for any member body would come. If this became part of the constitution, this committee would wield a veto power over any negotiation even before it began.

Through the efforts of the Missouri Synod, this article was finally separated from the rest of the constitution and made into an addendum to be discussed by the various pastoral conferences. This took place over the next four years. In 1944, it was reported that two synods were in favor of it (Wisconsin and Norwegian synods), while one (Missouri) was opposed to it. So the rest of the constitution was adopted, but final action on the addendum was tabled, and it was never brought up again.³⁶ The Missouri Synod opposed it, because it felt that it would "throw obstacles into the path of Lutheran union, or rather, God-pleasing unity."³⁷ Those in the Missouri Synod involved in the union effort viewed the addendum as another manifestation of the almost irrational fear of contamination on the part of the other synods.³⁸

³⁶ Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. Proceedings of the thirty-eighth Convention (Cleveland, 1944), pp. 9, 98.

³⁷ Letter, Karl Kretzmann to Wm. Arndt, April 15, 1939, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

³⁸ Letter, Karl Kretzmann to S. C. Ylvisaker, Aug. 18, 1939, Concordia Historical Institute, K. Kretzmann file.

The Synodical Conference had a thorough discussion of the fellowship situation at its 1940 convention. After hearing the Missouri Synod report, the majority of the convention recommended that that synod not enter into any kind of fellowship, including prayer fellowship, "until matters now objected to by members of the Synodical Conference have been clarified and until the whole matter has once more been presented to another meeting of the Synodical Conference."³⁹ It also approved the Wisconsin Synod recommendation that there be only one document used as a basis for any doctrinal agreement.

Thus the impetus for stalling or frustrating fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church came from its sister synods in the Synodical Conference. They opposed fellowship because they believed the American Lutheran Church taught false doctrine, but this was colored by their own historical background.

Opposition from Within the Missouri Synod

But these external pressures alone cannot completely explain the change in attitude evident at the 1941 Missouri Synod convention. If it was united in its determination to implement the St. Louis resolutions, nothing these sister synods, or even the Synodical Conference, could have done

³⁹Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. Proceedings of the thirty-seventh Convention (Chicago, 1940), p. 89.

would have deterred it. It might have had to choose between the Synodical Conference and the American Lutheran Church. But if it had been as united in its desire for broader relations with other churches as the American Lutheran Church was, it would have chosen the American Lutheran Church. But this desire was not dominant in the Missouri Synod in 1938, despite its convention action. There was a definite difference of opinion within the synod on the subject. From 1938 on, fellowship with the American Lutheran Church was the most discussed topic throughout the Missouri Synod.

First of all, there was a very vocal minority in the Missouri Synod which maintained a steady agitation against fellowship. Some of the leaders of this agitation were Arthur Beck, C. A. Bramscher, John Buenger, Paul Burgdorf, Carl Gullerud, William Oesch, and George Schweikert. All but Oesch were in the upper middle west. Oesch was in London at the time of the 1938 convention, and he played a part in the fight against fellowship by publishing the first anti-fellowship periodical, The Crucible.

This journal appeared from January to July, 1939. Then Oesch moved to Germany, where he remained throughout the war. This prevented him from continuing the publication, but he had already stated in its masthead from the beginning, "The present editor is to yield the editorial pen to an abler writer

in the U. S. as soon as the organization is sufficiently complete."⁴⁰

Already in the first issue, Oesch mentioned all the objections to the 1938 resolutions that were by then familiar: a committee should not work out such an agreement; the Declaration is full of loopholes; the membership of the American Lutheran Church in the American Lutheran Conference shows that it is unionistic; the American Lutheran Church still teach the old Iowa Synod idea of open questions.⁴¹

In subsequent issues, he added the criticisms that there had not been enough time before the 1938 convention for the delegates to study the Declaration; there should be only one document for any fellowship arrangement; and he repeated the misquotation that the American Lutheran Church accepted the Brief Statement, but only in light of their Declaration.⁴²

The Crucible served as a pioneer of sorts. But the periodical that succeeded it, The Confessional Lutheran, was to make a more significant impact on the Missouri Synod. It was edited throughout its existence by Pastor Paul Burgdorf. When he began the journal in 1940 he was serving

⁴⁰W. M. Oesch, The Crucible, I (Jan.-Feb., 1939), 2.

⁴¹W. M. Oesch, "Quo Vadis, Ecclesia," The Crucible, I (Jan.-Feb., 1939), 3-10.

⁴²W. M. Oesch, "Foreword," The Crucible, I (Mar.-Apr., 1939), 6-8.

a congregation in Red Lake Falls, Minn. His closest co-workers were also from Minnesota. Even before The Confessional Lutheran appeared in January, 1940, this group of anti-fellowship pastors had been arguing for their cause in pastoral conferences, in intersynodical meetings, and through correspondence. The Confessional Lutheran, whose motto was "Acceptance of the St. Louis Union Articles of 1938 must be rescinded," enabled them to reach a larger number of Missouri Synod pastors. Their objections to fellowship echoed those of the Wisconsin and Norwegian Synods. Indeed, it was more than a coincidence that those who made up this group lived in and around Minnesota, the stronghold of these two synods. Since little opposition to the fellowship resolutions came from elsewhere in the Missouri Synod, Graebner for one believed that these men were consciously under the influence and leadership of these other synods, especially the Norwegian Synod.⁴³

⁴³ Letters, Theo. Graebner to E. J. Friedrich, May 7, 1941; Theo. Graebner to Theo. Buenger, May 17, 1941; Theo. Graebner to Theo. Buenger, Feb. 12, 1940; Theo. Graebner to Theo. Schroeder, April 1, 1940; Concordia Historical Institute, Graebner file. This is not to say that there was no opposition elsewhere. In June, 1939, Arthur Beck sent out a post card questionnaire to determine how the pastors of the Missouri Synod felt about the Union Resolutions. He published the results in The Confessional Lutheran, II (Mar., 1941), 34f. "The attitude of our clergy as to the Question of Union with the A.L.C." This report showed that of the 3997 cards sent out, 1536 pastors replied. The breakdown of answers showed that 651 were in favor of unity under some condition; 559 were against it; and 258 undecided. If nothing else, this showed that there was disagreement in the synod over the issue.

These were men with a narrow theological perspective, living in largely rural areas where quarrels between the various Lutheran bodies involved split families and neighbors who shunned one another because they belonged to Lutheran churches of the "opponents." They had been brought up in the polemical atmosphere of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century controversies between the Missouri Synod and the other Lutheran bodies. They saw the 1938 action as a threat to what they understood to be true Lutheranism. So they regarded themselves to be in a holy war. But in their zeal they often went beyond the bounds of good manners or fairness. They justified the introduction of personalities and the stereotyping and generalizing of the other Lutherans by insisting that only the truth was important.⁴⁴ They reacted angrily to criticism that they were too suspicious or loveless or that they were forgetting the Eighth Commandment.⁴⁵

It got to the point that finally Theodore Graebner had to ask the St. Paul Pastoral Conference to officially censure

⁴⁴Burgdorf justified these excesses by saying, "I do believe, however, that it is at times necessary to mention names in discussing views, that charity itself may demand this, for more reasons than one, and that such a mentioning of names does not constitute 'personalities.'" Letter P. H. Burgdorf to Theo. Graebner, Dec. 4, 1940, Concordia Historical Institute, Graebner file.

⁴⁵Paul Burgdorf, "Lutheran Union," The Confessional Lutheran, I (Jan., Feb., March, 1940), 2f, 6f, 12ff.

Paul Durgdorf for some remarks he had made about Graebner and The Lutheran Witness in The Confessional Lutheran. This conference, in the heartland of the opposition to fellowship, had to agree with Graebner, an indication of the blatant nature of Durgdorf's attacks! It even said that

. . . no attacks be made hereafter in The Confessional Lutheran on articles and other discussions of problems relating to the union resolutions of 1938 by the editors of The Lutheran Witness, in that paper or elsewhere, unless all efforts through correspondence and personal conferences have been exhausted.⁴⁶

Even this did not stop the bitter polemics against the fellowship movement. Implications of heresy, suspicions of sinister plotting, quotations taken out of context, a resurrection of controversies settled decades before, and an unwillingness to listen to the other side marked the approach of those opposed to the 1938 resolutions. Graebner said of Deck's attacks against him:

It is the most vicious, vindictive, arrogant and contemptuous treatment that I have received in all my born days. . . Is it not sufficient if I forgive him his unhappy disposition and the fanatical streak which has developed under the influence of Norwegian Synod polemics?⁴⁷

However, this approach served its purpose. Fears of unionism were implanted in the minds of many members of the Missouri Synod. The opponents of fellowship kept up such a

⁴⁶"Minnesota District Pastoral Conference Minutes, June 12, 1940," Concordia Historical Institute, Karl Kretzmann file.

⁴⁷Letter, Theo. Graebner to Theo Duenger, May 17, 1941.

steady barrage of criticism that many began to take a second look at the 1938 action. It began to dawn on many that the 1938 resolutions were truly a departure from the past policies of the Missouri Synod in regard to church fellowship. The approach that the Wisconsin and Norwegian synods were taking, along with those supporting The Confessional Lutheran, was the approach taken by Pieper, or more accurately, his imitators and colleagues, in the generation just past. So these attacks by the opponents of fellowship made many in the Missouri Synod afraid that they might be betraying their past "orthodoxy" by establishing fellowship with any other church on a wrong basis.

The Response to the Opposition

There were defenders of the synod's actions, to be sure. The members of the Lutheran Union Committee spent much time in answering letters and appearing at Pastoral Conferences. For instance, William Arndt presented different essays at conferences in Portland, Ore., Chicago, Ft. Wayne, Ind., and in North Dakota from February to June, 1941. All of his essays dealt with the fellowship question in some way. The committee members defended the 1938 Resolutions and patiently tried to allay the fears and suspicions created by their opponents.

This committee also met with committees from their sister synods in the Synodical Conference in an attempt to explain the Missouri Synod position. Over and over again the committee members insisted that the old

controversies had been satisfactorily settled, in some cases, decades before. Over and over again they justified the convention's action that said that certain interpretations of Bible passages were not divisive of church fellowship. Over and over again they tried to answer the various objections raised against the Declaration. Over and over again they explained the relationship between it and the Brief Statement. But the polemics only increased.

Support for closer relations between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church came also from the liberal counterpart to The Confessional Lutheran, The American Lutheran. It was sponsored by the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, which had its origins in the Lutheran Publicity Bureau from the 400th anniversary of the Reformation observance in 1917. Although it was primarily a source of practical help in parish programs of stewardship, evangelism, and church publicity, it became increasingly a forum for articles that were regarded as too controversial for the official Missouri Synod periodicals. Wm. Arndt, O. A. Geisemann, Theo. Graebner, O. P. Kretzmann, A. C. Piepkorn, and Henry Wind all wrote articles on Lutheran Union in The American Lutheran. Editorially, it was outspoken in its support of the fellowship efforts. It said:

We have denounced efforts to block the carrying out of these plainly worded resolutions. We shall continue to denounce any effort from any quarter which indicates a loveless attitude

toward those officials and individuals who were charged with the duty of carrying out these resolutions. We shall continue to stand by and defend the 1938 resolutions of Synod.⁴⁸

Another Lutheran Journal which supported the position of the Missouri Synod was The Australasian Theological Review. This was the official theological magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Australia, a conservative body in fellowship with the Synodical Conference which was negotiating at this very time with another Lutheran church in Australia which was in fellowship with the American Lutheran Church. It approved of the 1938 resolutions, noting with satisfaction that the controversies with the American Lutheran Church now seemed to be at an end. It also criticized the attacks of the opponents of this action by saying:

In their well-meaning but misdirected zeal, certain writers have expressed distrust of the Committee on Lutheran Union, and distrust of the bona fides of those with whom fellowship is sought, even while strenuously and no doubt quite sincerely disclaiming any such intention. . . . It is not ethical to suspect trickery and subterfuge; nor can such suspicions be justified by quoting incidents from sixteenth-century church history. . . . The other matter which we must not simply deplore, but censure in the spirit of meekness, is the intemperate language resorted to by some of the friends from our own side. Nothing is quite so contagious or infectious

⁴⁸"The American Lutheran's Position Regarding Lutheran Unity," The American Lutheran, XXIII (Nov., 1940), 4.

as the feelings of panic. Those writers who pour out in printer's ink their doubts and fears, their anxieties and apprehensions; who in their mind's eye already see the Missouri Synod fallen from its high estate of strict confessionalism and entangled in unsanctified alliances with unionists and errorists--these are not rendering their church or other churches a service, to say the least. Is it right to unsettle and unhinge the minds of readers by filling them with a vague dread of dangers which are certainly always present among sinful men in a sinful world, but to which the officials and committees of the Missouri Synod mainly charged with conducting the negotiations are extremely unlikely to succumb? Sorrowfully, not cynically, we record our conviction that about one-half of what we have read on the movement ought never to have been written.⁴⁹

An important voice raised in defense of the 1938 resolutions was the editor of The Lutheran Witness, Theodore Graebner. As he observed the reactions of the opponents of fellowship, he began to come to the conclusion that these ultra-conservatives were taking a destructive, negative, schismatic position. Because of these excesses, Graebner himself gradually changed from a vehement foe of anything that might be considered unionism, to one of the most "liberal" of the faculty at the St. Louis Seminary in his later years. This did not mean that he was in favor of immediate union or fellowship with the American Lutheran Church. Indeed he wrote:

I stood against declaring fellowship relations in 1925 when we had come to doctrinal agreement

⁴⁹H. Hamann, "The Lutheran Union Movement," The Australasian Theological Review, X (Apr.-June, 1939), 43.

with the committeemen of Ohio and Iowa. The Folder containing the evidence on which I based this opposition to fraternal relations is still intact and practically every document in it is an argument even today, fifteen years later, against union with the A.L.C.⁵⁰

But he did try to mediate between the various sides in the Synodical Conference. For example, because of his earlier connections with the Norwegians he tried to be a mediator with them. In another instance, he co-sponsored a convention resolution in 1941, along with the men of The Confessional Lutheran, to suspend official discussions with the American Lutheran Church. Because of actions like this, it sometimes appeared that he was vacillating in his position, or that he was trying to satisfy all sides in the controversy. Yet from 1939 on, it was clear from his published writings that he rejected both the ideology and the methodology of those opposing closer relations with other churches.

Since what he wrote as editor of The Lutheran Witness had to be consistent with official synodical policy, he chose to use the American Lutheran and other publications as forums for his ideas. In one article for the American Lutheran, he criticized the official statements of the Wisconsin and Norwegian synods which denounced the 1938 action of the Missouri Synod. His main objection was the

⁵⁰Letter, Theo. Graebner to J. C. Meyer, May 3, 1940, Concordia Historical Institute, Graebner file.

suspicious attitude these churches exhibited over against the American Lutheran Church. He said:

The argument which has been directed against the union agreement and statements published since that time is based on the major premise that no sentence or phrase can be declared acceptable so long as standing by itself it permits of an evil interpretation. The formula may also be stated this way: any sentence or phrase that can be understood in an evil sense must so be understood. This implies, of course, that any omission will be viewed as intentional, as a denial of some truth.⁵¹

These statements are all the more significant when it is known that he was the editor of the Norwegian journal which opposed the "Opgjøer" in 1912.

To show how untenable this line of reasoning by these other synods was, he cited various statements from the Wisconsin and Norwegian synods which could be regarded as deficient on the same basis. Yet because these synods taught elsewhere the doctrine correctly, these inadequate statements were acceptable. He asked that the same treatment be given statements from the American Lutheran Church. He ended one article by saying, "I am not ready to admit that an orthodoxy which offends in the law of love in judging of the words of opponents (and of fellow-Christians) is sound Lutheran theology."⁵²

⁵¹Theo. Graebner, "Lutheran Union. A Plea for Sanity and Charity," The American Lutheran, XXII (Dec., 1939), 7.

⁵²Theo. Graebner, "Not a Sect--Yet," The American Lutheran, XXIII (Jan., 1940), 22.

This emphasis on fairness and charity was often heard within the Synodical Conference at this time. "Orthodoxy" meant not only speaking the truth, but speaking it in love! Graebner insisted that if this were observed, a solution to the problem of Lutheran union could be found. He maintained that great obstacles remained. Matters concerning church practice and fellowship were unresolved. But there was a basic doctrinal agreement between the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod, enough so that they could lay the doctrinal issues aside and concentrate on these practical issues, especially on the basic question of what was necessary for fellowship itself.

2. The Desire of the American Lutheran Church to Have
Closer Relations with all Lutherans

With the United Lutheran Church

While the opponents of fellowship were exerting pressure on the Missouri Synod to rescind its 1938 position, the desire of the American Lutheran Church to be a mediator for all Lutheran churches was complicating the situation further for the Missouri Synod. The American Lutheran Church was attempting to establish new relations with both the Missouri Synod on the right and the United Lutheran Church on the left, while at the same time maintaining its relations with those in the American Lutheran Conference. It was the inevitable that it could not be successful in all of these union endeavors.

The first indication that its ambitions for pan-Lutheran fellowship faced difficulties came early in 1939 when the American Lutheran Church committee announced its accord with the committee of the United Lutheran Church on the three major issues that were obstacles to fellowship. These were lodge membership, especially of pastors in the United Lutheran Church, unionism, especially pulpit and altar fellowship with non-Lutherans, and the inspiration of the Bible. The final statement was adopted by the two committees on Feb. 13, 1939 in Pittsburgh, Pa., so it was called the Pittsburgh Agreement.⁵³

The section that would cause the most trouble was the third one, on the Bible. From 1936 to 1939 committees from the American Lutheran Church, the United Lutheran Church, and the Missouri Synod had been meeting with each other. However, the negotiations between the Missouri Synod and the United Lutheran Church had broken off after the meeting on Feb. 26, 1938. The reason given for this break was that the United Lutheran Church delegation would not agree to the ideas in the Brief Statement on verbal inspiration and the inerrancy of the Bible.⁵⁴

⁵³For the text, see Wolf, Documents, pp. 378f. For a fuller treatment of the negotiations leading up to it, see Nelson, Lutheranism, pp. 95ff.

⁵⁴The United Lutheran Church in America. Minutes of the Eleventh Biennial Convention (Baltimore, 1938), p. 468; "Statement of Dr. C. M. Jacobs at the Detroit Colloquy [between the Missouri Synod and United Lutheran Church committees] Nov. 24, 1936," Concordia Historical Institutd, Karl Kretzmann file.

On the other hand, the discussions between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church had produced a statement in the Declaration that clearly stated that the Bible was wholly inspired and "without contradiction and error."⁵⁵ Imagine the surprise within the Missouri Synod when the Pittsburgh Agreement was published, and it contained the statement that the Bible books, "constitute a complete, errorless, unbreakable whole, of which Christ is the center."⁵⁶ The United Lutheran Church committee that met with the other committees was identical. Yet it had refused to agree on the plenary inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible in its discussion with the Missouri Synod committee while apparently it had agreed on these ideas with the American Lutheran Church committee.

After the initial surprise and shock wore off, there was genuine alarm among the official Missouri Synod circles.⁵⁷ "The question was, How could the American Lutheran Church commission accept our position and at the same time find itself in harmony with the United Lutheran Church of America commissioners?"⁵⁸ A quick meeting was held between Michael Reu

⁵⁵ Wolf, Documents, p. 395.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 379.

⁵⁷ Letter, Wm. Arndt to Paul H. Buehring, Mar. 12, 1939. Buehring's reply of March 17 shows that he was also taken by surprise. Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

⁵⁸ The Missouri Synod. Proceedings, 1941, p. 279.

and Emanuel Poppen of the American Lutheran Church and John Behnken, William Arndt, and Theodore Engelder of the Missouri Synod on March 15, 1939 to find the answer. The men from the American Lutheran Church explained the situation to what they thought was the satisfaction of the Missouri Synod men. They explained that the phrases that the Missouri Synod were concerned about were actually written by Dr. Reu himself, a man known to be a staunch supporter of verbal inspiration and inerrancy. They told of the interrogation they gave to the United Lutheran Church committee when the phrase "a complete, errorless, unbreakable whole of which Christ is the center" was presented as a compromise statement. (The official minutes of this meeting on February 13 show that President Knubel of the United Lutheran Church admitted that this phrase was understood in different ways by the two committees, but he did regard it as a step beyond the Baltimore Declaration which his church had adopted in 1938. This Declaration on the Bible had been too vague for the American Lutheran Church representatives, so when Knubel said this, Dr. Reu expressed his satisfaction with the statement in question.)⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Nelson, Lutheranism, pp. 105f. Dr. Buehring wrote to Dr. Arndt in his March 17, 1939 letter that Dr. Gast of the American Lutheran Church committee that met with the United Lutheran Church committee told the faculty of the seminary at Columbus, Ohio, that his committee was convinced that the United Lutheran Church commissioners agreed with them on this issue.

Yet after this explanatory meeting, the Missouri Synod committee drafted a report on the Pittsburgh Agreement which was critical and very negative. It not only said that the crucial section containing the word "errorless" was inadequate and ambiguous, but it also said that several other statements were open to misunderstanding.⁶⁰ Among the parts criticized was a statement which had been part of Reu's original statement of Scriptures presented to the Inter-Synodical Committee on May 27, 1936. At that time, the minutes said, "The Missouri representatives declared that they find in this statement a perfect presentation of their position."⁶¹ This official report on the Pittsburgh Agreement compounded the difficulty by stating that when the meeting was held on March 15, the American Lutheran Church men said that they

. . . by accepting the above statement [the Pittsburgh Agreement] did not intend to recede from the position on the doctrine of Inspiration as set forth in the Brief Statement. . . and the Declaration. . . adopted by the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod.⁶²

⁶⁰The Committee on Lutheran Union, "Concerning Lutheran Union," The Lutheran Witness, LXIII (April 18, 1939), 139f.

⁶¹The Intersynodical Committee, Minutes of the second meeting, May 26 and 27, 1936. Although Arndt later wrote that the Missouri Synod committee argued about that part of the statement about the Bible being the history of revelation. He said that the American Lutheran Church committee finally dropped the word "history." This was not spelled out in the minutes. Letter, Wm. Arndt to Theo. Duenger, March 5, 1941, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

⁶²The Committee on Lutheran Union, "Concerning Lutheran Union," p. 240.

This remark disturbed Reu. He wrote to Dr. Arndt that:

it would be clearer, if it had been implied at least that your commission was satisfied with it. Since this is missing, there will be a suspicion aroused in many distrustful people, for which the inclusion of such a remark may become a hindrance.⁶³

Officials of the Synod disagreed whether this report should be published at that time. President Behnken and Dr. Engelder were in favor of immediate publication.⁶⁴ Dr. Arndt and Pastor Kretzmann were opposed to this action. Kretzmann felt that to publish the report would be to "rock the boat" at a very crucial time.⁶⁵ When Dr. Reu read a draft of the report, he declared that the criticisms could be easily dealt with at a joint committee meeting, and that publication of the report about a subject "on which we are absolutely united" might become the beginning of the end of the unity efforts.⁶⁶

But there was no joint meeting, and despite one postponement of publication, this report was printed in The Lutheran Witness of April 18, 1939. The editors tried

⁶³ Letter, Michael Reu to William Arndt, March 26, 1939, p. 1, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file; author's translation.

⁶⁴ Letters, M. Reu to O. P. Kretzmann, March 27, 1939, Concordia Historical Institute, Karl Kretzmann file; Wm. Arndt to John W. Behnken, March 31, 1939, Arndt file.

⁶⁵ Letter, Kark Kretzmann to Theo. Graebner, April 15, 1939, Concordia Historical Institute, K. Kretzmann file.

⁶⁶ Letters, M. Reu to O. P. Kretzmann, March 27, 1939; M. Reu to Wm. Arndt, March 26, 1939.

to soften the effect in an unusual accompanying editorial. They sought to emphasize a difference between a correct statement and an adequate one since the report had only said that the Pittsburgh Agreement was inadequate. They also went to great lengths to show that the criticisms were aimed more at the United Lutheran Church than at the American Lutheran Church. They insisted that the American Lutheran Church was trustworthy when it used words like "errorless," while it was difficult to have the same attitude towards the United Lutheran Church, since there had been so many official and unofficial statements from that church in very recent years which denied the concepts of verbal inspiration and inerrancy.⁶⁷

This approach is reminiscent of the attitude that the other Synodical Conference churches had taken over against the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church. However, there was a difference, if only in degree. These opponents of fellowship had usually based their suspicions on statements either taken out of context or made years before. In this case, there were contemporary statements, even convention resolutions, from the United Lutheran Church which clearly and deliberately contradicted the conservative interpretation of the statements in the Pittsburgh Agreement. These statements and resolutions were quoted in the Witness editorial. They had also been discussed in articles

⁶⁷The Editors, "Editorial Opinion," The Lutheran Witness, LXIII (April 18, 1939), 240.

and editorials in the Journal of the American Lutheran Conference, edited by an American Lutheran pastor, J. A. Dell.⁶⁸ The main point discussed in that journal was that although the Baltimore Declaration on the Scriptures seemed to say that all of the Bible was inspired, the interpretation of this Declaration given in United Lutheran Church periodicals specifically denied that this was the same as verbal inspiration or that it meant that the Bible was infallible truth in secular matters, ideas that both the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church were committed to. So suspicion about what the United Lutheran Church meant by the Pittsburgh Agreement was not limited to the Synodical Conference or the Missouri Synod. Subsequent events showed that there had been foundation for these suspicions.

President Behnken of the Missouri Synod personally tried to get President Knubel to clarify the situation.

⁶⁸[J. A.] Dell, "Post Script," Journal of the American Lutheran Conference, III (Dec., 1938), 3ff. In this editorial he raised the question of what the United Lutheran Church really meant in its Baltimore Declaration, since the Nov. 2, 1938 issue of The Lutheran expressly repudiated Verbal Inspiration, and insisted that the Baltimore Declaration did not accept it. At the same time, Dell's first reading of the Baltimore Declaration had led him to rejoice that the United Lutheran Church was accepting it. In his "Addendum" of the same journal, IV (May, 1939), 33ff., he raised the same question over the Pittsburgh Agreement.

He carried on correspondence with both Knubel and President Poppen of the American Lutheran Church and even attempted to have a three-way meeting with all the committees involved. His main concern was to determine whether the United Lutheran Church had changed its mind and now agreed in essence with his church and the American Lutheran Church on inspiration and inerrancy. But Knubel resisted any official explanation because he felt it might tend to confuse rather than to clarify the issue and might reflect unfavorably on the committees' work.⁶⁹ At the same time, his personal answers to Behnken were very vague and ambiguous.

Finally, Knubel wrote a letter to his committee asking for their opinions. In this letter, he made his own position clear. He said:

So far as we of the ULCA are concerned, we recognize all of these statements [that is, the Pittsburgh Agreement, the Baltimore Declaration, The Brief Statement, and the Declaration] to be within the scope of historical, confessional Lutheranism.⁷⁰

In other words, it was permissible to interpret statements about inspiration in these statements in almost any way,

⁶⁹Letters, J. W. Behnken to W. Arndt, Mar. 29, 1939; Frederick H. Knubel to J. W. Behnken, Mar. 31, 1939; J. W. Behnken to F. H. Knubel, April 6, 1939, April 12, 1939; J. W. Behnken to Em. Poppen, April 12, 1939; Em. Poppen to J. W. Behnken, April 14, 1939; F. H. Knubel to J. W. Behnken, April 19, 1939; J. W. Behnken to Em. Poppen, April 25, 1939; F. H. Knubel to J. W. Behnken, May 3, 1939; J. W. Behnken to F. H. Knubel, May 23, 1939; Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

⁷⁰F. H. Knubel to the members of the Commission on Relations to other Lutheran Bodies, April 19, 1939, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

whether in harmony with the more liberal Baltimore Declaration or with the more strict Brief Statement. Therefore, there was no need to pin down exactly what the words in the Pittsburgh Agreement did mean.

This approach was made official at the 1940 United Lutheran Church convention. At this convention, the Pittsburgh Agreement was presented for adoption. Three of the eight members of the committee which had prepared the document with the American Lutheran Church formally registered their dissent to it, as did the convention of the Central Pennsylvania Synod. The Agreement was adopted, but only after this resolution was attached to it.

... that the three Articles of Agreement herewith submitted to not in any way alter the fundamental position of the U.L.C.A. and that they are not contrary to or contradictory of the positions set forth in the Washington Declaration of 1920, the Savannah Resolutions of 1934, or to the Baltimore Declaration of 1938.⁷¹

Therefore the United Lutheran Church indicated officially that it did not interpret the Pittsburgh

⁷¹The United Lutheran Church in America. Minutes of the twelfth Biennial Convention (Omaha, 1940), p. 263. In fact, the resolution in question went even further, saying that the Pittsburgh Agreement must be interpreted "in the light of the earlier statements and not vice versa." This was made clear in articles by two of the church's leading Biblical scholars. Herbert C. Alleman, "The Pittsburgh Agreement and Lutheran Unity," The Lutheran Church Quarterly XIII (July, 1940), 343ff; H. D. Offerman (a member of the Union committee), "An interpretation of the Baltimore Declaration," The Lutheran Church Quarterly, XII (July, 1939), 279ff.

Agreement in the same way that the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church did. In fact, it repudiated its president's statement on February 13 to Dr. Reu that the Pittsburgh Agreement was a step beyond the Baltimore Declaration.

So the Missouri Synod report on this Agreement was vindicated. What it said was all correct. And if it had been meant more as a protest against the permissive and ambiguous attitude of the United Lutheran Church than as a statement against the American Lutheran Church, it served a purpose. But it appeared at a very inopportune time. The net result was a step backwards in the relations between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church. It placed the American Lutheran Church in the position of having to defend its actions, and thereby it ended the trust build up between the two bodies through the committee negotiations.

For the American Lutheran Church, in order to gain the approval of its 1940 convention for the Agreement, flatly stated that the United Lutheran Church was accepting its own position. This was clearly not the case, in view of what had happened at the United Lutheran Church convention.⁷²

⁷²The American Lutheran Church. Minutes of the Sixth Convention (Detroit, 1940), pp. 315f. The official resolution stated that the American Lutheran Church believed that the Pittsburgh Agreement was in complete harmony with the Declaration and the Brief Statement which clearly taught a verbally inspired, inerrant Bible.

So even though the American Lutheran Church declined to establish fellowship with the United Lutheran Church, the damage had been done.⁷³

The American Lutheran Church and The
American Lutheran Conference

Another fellowship effort by the American Lutheran Church that complicated negotiations with the Missouri Synod was the ongoing involvement in the American Lutheran Conference. Its membership in this group was one of the biggest obstacles to fellowship with the Missouri Synod. Indeed, Dr. Arndt could have been correct when he said,

If the membership of the A.L.C. in the American Lutheran Conference did not stand in the way, probably already last summer [1938] church fellowship could have been declared.⁷⁴

The crucial issue was over the understanding of fellowship, and in the Missouri Synod's way of looking at it, the American Lutheran Church was wrong for having fellowship with the less conservative Scandinavian bodies.

However, the Missouri Synod committee had never insisted that the American Lutheran Church must leave the Conference immediately. It recognized that the American Lutheran Church was trying, and with some success,

⁷³"Report of the Committee on Lutheran Union addressed to the Clergy of the Missouri Synod," July 12, 1939, pp. 2f.

⁷⁴Letter, Wm. Arndt to G. F. Fritschel, March 17, 1939, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file, Author's translation.

to influence its sister synods towards a more conservative Lutheranism. On its part, the American Lutheran Church was afraid that these other churches would interpret any improvement of relations with the Missouri Synod as a threat to the Conference. This was why its convention inserted the phrase, "We are not willing to give up membership. . ." into its 1938 resolutions.⁷⁵ For it was true that the Missouri Synod did hold that the American Lutheran Church, if it wanted fellowship, would have to make a choice between it and the Conference sooner or later. The Missouri Synod committee said:

Since the American Lutheran Church now is a member of the American Lutheran Conference, it cannot leave this federation at once. Its endeavor must be to bring about acceptance of the doctrinal position of the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod by the other constituent bodies of the American Lutheran Conference. If these attempts fail, then, of course, it will be the duty of the American Lutheran Church to withdraw.⁷⁶

⁷⁵The American Lutheran Church. Minutes, 1938, p. 256. Dr. Buehring explained this statement in this way. "Some of the brethren seemed to fear that disaster would come upon the Conference almost immediately after we recognized Missouri. That was the reason for the insertion in Point 5 of the sentence ["we are not willing to give up membership, etc."] Letter, P. H. Buehring to Karl Kretzmann, Oct. 21, 1938, Concordia Historical Institute, K. Kretzmann file.

⁷⁶"A Letter of the Committee on Lutheran Union addressed to the Clergy of the Missouri Synod," Dec. 8, 1939, p. 9. This was reiterated in "Lutheran Union: A Discussion, VII," The Lutheran Witness, LIX (Aug. 20, 1940), 292: "There can be fellowship with the A.L.C. on the part of our Synod only if these differences [between the Missouri Synod and the other members of the American Lutheran Conference] are removed; or if

So the American Lutheran Church was in a real dilemma. It viewed the Conference as a victory for Lutheran unity. For the first time Lutheran churches from German, Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish backgrounds had been able to form a federation on a fairly conservative doctrinal basis. The Synodical Conference in its heyday had only included German and Norwegian elements; the General Council had German and Swedish churches, but it was not conservative enough for the rest. So the American Lutheran Church was very reluctant to give this fellowship up too quickly. Yet it might have to if it wanted closer relations with the Missouri Synod.

The Scandinavian groups were certainly less conservative than the American Lutheran Church. A comparison of the Minneapolis Theses and either the Brief Statement or the Declaration makes this clear. And one important area where there were differences among the churches in the Conference dealt with church fellowship. This can be seen by the articles from the various groups on this subject between 1931 and 1935. Even Dr. Reu noted that there were inconsistencies in how some of these churches dealt with the practical aspects of this issue. But he said:

I am not unaware of the fact that, in some instances, these [Minneapolis] Theses, particularly the Galesburg Rule, are ignored

that should prove impossible, this condition implies that fellowship relations be terminated between the A.L.C. and its affiliated bodies."

in practice; but I know also that the proper authorities are waging an aggressive and resolute battle against such abuses.⁷⁷

The American Lutheran Church, in attempting to be the mediator between the Scandinavians and Missouri, created a real problem for the Missouri Synod. Its committee sought clarification from the American Lutheran Church committee on the situation with the American Lutheran Conference. It was told by both the committee and the convention of the American Lutheran Church that its continuation of membership in the Conference was conditioned by future developments. This implied to the Missouri Synod that there might be a time when the American Lutheran Church would leave the Conference if it was convinced that it could no longer conscientiously remain a member. The 1940 Convention of the American Lutheran Church resolved: "We entertain the confident hope that our sister synods in the American Lutheran Conference will occupy the same ground in these matters [of doctrine] now occupied by us."⁷⁸

This type of statement made at this convention led the Missouri Synod to assume that something would be done at the American Lutheran Conference convention in Minneapolis later that year to start the process of doctrinal discussions.

⁷⁷Michael Reu, In the Interest of Lutheran Unity (Columbus, Ohio: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1940), p. 31.

⁷⁸The American Lutheran Church. Minutes 1940, p. 315.

Its Union Committee, at least, took these statements from the American Lutheran Church to mean that it would take some initiative to implement the unity efforts at Menneapolis. For the Missouri Synod had tried, without success, to carry out its part of the 1938 resolutions by discussing the situation with its sister synods in the Synodical Conference. Therefore, it assumed that the American Lutheran Church would proceed in a similar way. The Missouri Synod committee had been told that the members of the American Lutheran Conference were being informed about their meetings, but nothing had happened in a Conference convention as yet. Thus the 1940 Conference convention seemed the logical place for the issue to be presented.

They were disappointed and not a little perturbed. For in spite of the fact that the Commission on Lutheran Church Unity of the Conference reported that it had met a number of times during the previous two years to discuss Lutheran unity, and in spite of the fact that several of the main speakers referred to the Missouri Synod's position that the churches of the Conference would need to "place themselves on the same doctrinal basis as the two negotiating bodies"⁷⁹ nothing about any discussion

⁷⁹These are the words used by Arndt when he addressed the American Lutheran Church convention in Detroit. In response to this, Prof. T. F. Gullixson of the Norwegian Lutheran Church said at the American Lutheran Conference

of the Brief Statement or the Declaration appeared in the Commission's report. This omission was justified by the President of the Conference by saying, "It has not found the times propitious for the formation of closer ties among Lutherans. Less stormy days, conducive of calm deliberations, are necessary to accomplish such rapprochement."⁸⁰ In addition, President Ponnen and others of the American Lutheran Church gave repeated assurances that their church "has no other plan or desire than to continue as a member body of the Conference."⁸¹ The mood of the convention regarding Lutheran Unity was epitomized by the report of the Commission on Lutheran Church unity: "It has been demonstrated that we all possess the same spiritual heritage and that we hold fast to the same spiritual truth."⁸²

Convention: "This question as to the degree of detail in confessional pronouncement is squarely before us, and also the question as to a right and courteous procedure." "The American Lutheran Conference in the Future," The Journal of Theology of the American Lutheran Conference, VI (Jan., 1941), 119f.

⁸⁰ E. E. Ryden, "The President's Report," The Journal of Theology of the American Lutheran Conference, VI (Jan., 1941), 36. This reference to the war between German and Scandanivan countries was made in other speeches.

⁸¹ [Wm.] A[rndt], "The American Lutheran Conference," Concordia Theological Monthly, XII (Jan., 1941), 62, quoting from Ryden's report to the Augustana Synod in The Lutheran Companion, Nov. 28, 1940.

⁸² The American Lutheran Conference. "Proceedings of the fifth Biennial Convention of the American Lutheran Conference, (Minneapolis, 1940)," in Journal of Theology of the American Lutheran Conference, VI (Jan., 1941), 44.

Reaction was swift from the Missouri Synod. President Behnken said,

I realize that this statement ["We are not willing. . ."] has been explained, but when a person remembers what happened at Minneapolis at the Convention of the American Lutheran Conference, the explanation that it must not be taken as an absolute statement begins to wobble.⁸³

Even Pastor Fred Lindemann, associated with The American Lutheran and certainly no foe of fellowship, made a very negative and discouraging report of the convention. He mentioned, almost incredulously, the silence at the Conference convention of Poppen, Schuette, Reu and the other American Lutheran Church delegates about the need for doctrinal agreement.⁸⁴ He and others noted the oft-mentioned desire of the Conference leaders to occupy a middle ground between the Synodical Conference and the United Lutheran Church, and their preoccupation with cooperative programs.

So articles critical of the situation quickly appeared, also in the official Synodical journals.⁸⁵ Arndt justified this action in this way:

⁸³ Letter, John W. Behnken to Theo. Graebner, Dec. 11, 1942, Concordia Historical Institute, Graebner file.

⁸⁴ Letter, Fred Lindemann to Theo. Graebner, Nov. 15, 1940, Concordia Historical Institute, Graebner file.

⁸⁵ "Strategic Position' of the A.L. Conference," The Lutheran Witness, LIX (Nov. 26, 1940), 404f; Wm. Arndt, "The American Lutheran Conference," Concordia Theological Monthly, p. 62; Norman A. Madson, "The Minneapolis Meeting of the American Lutheran Conference, November 13-15, 1940," Theologisches Quartalschrift, 38, (April, 1941), 125ff.

The men in the A.L.C. will have to realize that if they do not mean business and do not work for an improvement of conditions in the American Lutheran Conference, then the hope of fellowship with Missouri must vanish.⁸⁶

The Missouri Synod committee was losing confidence in the American Lutheran Church.⁸⁷

Now the American Lutheran Church leaders had reasons for their silence, which they regarded as sufficient. First of all, they knew that there was strong, unwavering opposition to establishing fellowship on "new Theological theses" such as the Declaration or the Brief Statement in the Conference. The President of the Augustana Synod had said this in no uncertain terms at the Detroit convention of the American Lutheran Church. There could be no mistaking his words:

⁸⁶Letter, Wm. Arndt to Karl Kretzmann, Dec. 12, 1940, Concordia Historical Institute, K. Kretzmann file.

⁸⁷Michael Reu, "Muessen die Verhandlungen mit Missouri nun aufhoeren?" Kirchliche Zeitschrift, 65 (Oct., 1941), 588. See also the conclusion drawn by the editors of The Lutheran Witness. After analyzing the events concerning the Pittsburgh Agreement and the Minneapolis convention of the American Lutheran Conference, they concluded that the American Lutheran Church had several factions. So they said, "It remains now that we encourage that strong element in the American Lutheran Church which wants union on a Scriptural basis to unite their forces with those who believe as we believe in the Norwegian and Swedish Synods, and also in the United Lutheran Church. It now begins to appear that separation is the only possible way to union." "The Prospects for Lutheran Union," The Lutheran Witness LIX (Dec. 10, 1940), 422. Cf. "Which Way Lies Union?" Lutheran Standard, XCIX (Jan. 4, 1941), 9 for reaction from the American Lutheran Church.

. . .if the American Lutheran Church is waiting for the Augustana Synod to "endorse your note" to the Missouri Synod, if you want us to be a cosigner to the agreement, if you are waiting for us to adopt those articles as a premise for your concordat with the Missouri Synod, you may as well forget about it right now.⁸⁸

Secondly, these leaders felt that the general convention of the Conference was not the time nor the place to raise the issue, although they had not clearly explained this to the Missouri Synod leaders. In response to criticism that he failed to introduce the fellowship issue at Minneapolis, Poppen said:

Had I done this, the chairman of the Conference would have been obliged to rule me out of order, reminding me that the conference exercises no authority over its constituent synods and that the matter presented by me should be addressed to the several synods and not to the Conference. His decision would have been right.⁸⁹

Later in this same letter, he indicated that he had raised the issue with the other presidents, to have their churches review the union documents, but

⁸⁸[Th.] E[ngelder], "Is the Lutheran Union in the Offing?" *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XII (April, 1941), 305, quoting Bersell in *The Lutheran Companion*, Jan. 23, 1941.

⁸⁹Letter, Em. Poppen to Theo. Graebner, Aug. 3, 1943, Concordia Historical Institute, Graebner file. In this connection, Buehring had written to Reu, "Der Vorwand in 'I' [referring to a resolution presented to the 1941 Missouri Synod convention by both the ultra-conservatives and Graebner], dass wir keine Schritte getan haben, unser Verhaeltnis zur Am. Luth. Conf. abzubrechen, ist einfach aus der Luft gegriffen; wir haben das doch nie versprochen sondern sind in Gegenteil von den missourischen Commissioners ermuntert worden, in der Conference zu bleiben, solange wir dort einen Einfluss ausueben koennen." Letter, P. H. Buehring to M. Reu, May 10, 1941, Archives of the American Lutheran Church, Reu file.

. . .they declined to do so because of their conviction that the time was inopportune for such a step. As they expressed it, there was still too much bitterness against the Missouri Synod. This development was reported by me to your Synod's committee.⁹⁰

Thirdly, they supported the idea of a general Lutheran conference to discuss joint efforts to deal with the war emergency and related problems. They did not want to jeopardize this with any controversy over their fellowship negotiations.

Fourthly, and perhaps underlying all these other factors, the American Lutheran Church had found a congenial new relationship with these other churches, and it did not want to do anything to disturb this, especially at this tenth anniversary convention, where over and over again the theme was emphasized that the Conference must work harder than ever to proceed together, always improving on its emerging unity.⁹¹

But the Missouri Synod did not seem to appreciate these considerations. Because it had met in formal discussions with its sister synods, it assumed that the American Lutheran Church would necessarily follow the same procedure. When it did not do this, the Missouri Synod reacted with a vengeance.

⁹⁰Letter, E. Poppen to T. Graebner, August 3, 1943.

⁹¹The Lutheran Witness looked on this as "Church politics." The Editors, "The Prospects for Lutheran Union, p. 422. Poppen objected to this phrase, and Graebner explained that the attempt to follow a middle of the road policy by the American Lutheran Church was creating the unsatisfactory situation between the two churches. Letter, Theo. Graebner, to E. Poppen, Jan. 4, 1941, Archives of the American Lutheran Church, ALC and Missouri file.

It sidestepped all requests by the American Lutheran Church committee to meet before the 1941 Missouri Synod convention. It refused to allow American Lutheran Church representatives to address that convention, in spite of the fact that Dr. Arndt had spoken to the Detroit convention in 1940.

Later on, Karl Kretzmann said of these decisions:

I am not yet convinced that we acted "like Christian gentlemen" when we refused to meet with the ALC commission in the Spring of 1941 and give them an opportunity to explain what happened (or did not happen) at Minneapolis in the fall of 1940; and that we would not let Reu and Buehring to appear at Ft. Wayne, after the ALC had been courteous enough to allow our representatives to appear before the Detroit convention in 1940. That these "rebuffs" rankle in the hearts of [sic] some of our friends in the ALC is evident from the reference to them in printed reports.⁹²

Thus the membership of the American Lutheran Church in the American Lutheran Conference had a direct bearing on the cooling relations between the two churches in 1941..

3. The Different Approaches to Church Fellowship

The Official Negotiations After 1938

All of the pressure from its sister synods and its own opponents of fellowship, and all of the events involving the American Lutheran Church and other Lutherans influenced the progress of official negotiations. In the first meeting of the committees of the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri

⁹²Letter, K. Kretzmann to W. Arndt, April 2, 1943, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file. Cf. W. Arndt to K. Kretzmann, Dec. 12, 1940, same file.

Synod after the conventions of 1938, instead of continuing from where the discussions had left off, with further discussions of those items still unresolved, the Missouri Synod committee asked for clarification of the Sandusky Resolutions. This first meeting took place on Jan. 2, 1939.

At this time the Missouri Synod delegation formally communicated the objections of the opponents of fellowship against various statements of the American Lutheran Church:

1. "He also purposes to justify those who have come to faith." (This statement was in the Declaration).
2. "It is neither necessary nor possible to agree on all non-fundamental doctrines."
3. "We believe that the Brief Statement viewed in the light of our Declaration is not in contradiction to the Minneapolis Theses."
4. "We are not willing to give up this membership [in the American Lutheran Conference]."

These last three statements were from the convention resolutions. Some practical problems of implementing the new emerging relationship between the two churches were also discussed, such as the details of intersynodical pastoral conferences, the problem of "opposition altars," the progress in meetings with sister synods, and the matter of transferring members between churches, but the major emphasis of the meeting was on these questions raised by the Missouri Synod.

The American Lutheran Church committee acceded to their wishes and drafted a detailed answer to each item. To #1, it said that justification takes place at the same moment that a person comes to faith. To #2, it said:

In regard to points that lie far distant from the center, points that are usually called non-fundamental, we believe that here on earth it is neither necessary nor possible to achieve complete agreement. Disagreement in these points is not divisive of church fellowship.⁹³

It agreed that if something is taught in the Bible, it is binding, whether fundamental or non-fundamental. At the same time, it insisted that church fellowship was not contingent on total agreement on explanations of all these passages. To #3 it said that the Declaration was designed to supplement the Brief Statement. It insisted that it accepted the Brief Statement in its doctrinal position, but not necessarily "sharing the exegetical or other lines of argumentation in every case without being obligated in every case to employ the same terminology."⁹⁴ It listed six places in the Brief Statement where it disagreed with exegesis or terminology, while agreeing on the doctrine involved. To #4 it said that the statement about membership in the American Lutheran Conference was not an absolute one, but "one conditioned by the future development of the American Lutheran Conference."⁹⁵

⁹³"Supplement to the Minutes of the Intersynodical Committee, 1/2/39." The Missouri Synod committee objected to this statement and it was deleted in the final draft.

⁹⁴The Committee on Lutheran Union, "The Present Status of the Discussions of the Missouri Synod with the American Lutheran Church," Concordia Theological Monthly, X (Dec., 1939), 933.

⁹⁵"Supplement," p. 3: "Present Status," p. 935. Reactions from members of the Missouri Synod committee show that they did not understand how exegetical disagreements could exist along with doctrinal agreement. Letters.

This whole discussion opened a "Pandora's Box." Not only was the Missouri Synod Committee calling a part of the Declaration into question, but the American Lutheran Church committee was citing statements in the Brief Statement with which it did not totally agree. And just a few months before, both bodies had declared that these two documents together formed a sufficient basis for (future) church fellowship. Now this committee action opened up again the whole question of how much doctrinal agreement was necessary for fellowship. In St. Louis, the Missouri Synod had said it was not necessary to have complete agreement. Now its committee was close to reversing this position. In Sandusky the American Lutheran Church had said that it accepted the Brief Statement, and glossed over differences. Now its committee was going into detail about where it disagreed with the Brief Statement.

At the next joint meeting, on September 29 and 30, 1939, some of these problems seemed to be resolved. On #1 the American Lutheran Church delegation specifically declared "We adhere to the doctrine of objective justification." This had been the concern of the Missouri Synod. The American Lutheran Church committee had expressed a concern that the Wisconsin Synod resolutions that the Missouri

F. H. Brunn to the committee members, May 9, 1939; Cf. Brommer to W. Arndt, May 11, 1939, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

Synod cease negotiations would jeopardize future discussions. The Missouri Synod delegation assured them that the Wisconsin Synod had not convinced them that it was wrong to continue. The American Lutheran Church committee revised its reply to the Missouri Synod objections, and it was generally acceptable to the Missouri Synod. The exceptions regarded the use of Bible passages to prohibit prayer fellowship, and a minor point about predestination. All other objections and replies were accepted by both committees.⁹⁶

At the next meeting, held in May of 1940, the American Lutheran Church committee asked for a formal statement of what still stood in the way of actual church fellowship. This was presented to the 1940 American Lutheran Church convention. This statement reviewed all of these earlier objections, noting where there was accord. But it clearly stated the remaining obstacles. They were all connected with the basic issue of how to understand church fellowship. It stated that both the Synodical Conference and the American Lutheran Conference would have to accept the same confessional basis. It expressed concern over the recent overtures of the American Lutheran Church toward the more liberal United Lutheran Church. It pointed to the need for agreement on items of church practice, such as on the lodge issue and prayer fellowship, before fellowship could be attained.

⁹⁶Brunn, "Present Status," pp. 931ff.

The 1940 American Lutheran Church convention ratified the committee replies to the Missouri Synod objections.⁹⁷ In so doing, it demonstrated not only where the two church bodies were coming closer together, but where they were still separated. Again, as in 1938, there seemed to be doctrinal agreement, although now it was more fragile than two years earlier. The major barriers still had to do with how much agreement in doctrine and practice was necessary for church fellowship, prayer fellowship, or even cooperation in church work. The two churches were certainly no closer to fellowship, and in some ways, further apart.

The Problem of "Non-Fundamentals"

The situation was complicated by the confusing use of the terms "non-fundamentals" and "open questions." Neither of these terms had been used in the Declaration or the report of the Missouri Synod Committee on Lutheran Church Unity to the 1938 convention. However, that convention's Committee for Intersynodical and Doctrinal Matters (Committee 16) had called the interpretations for which the American Lutheran Church asked tolerance "non-fundamental doctrines." This was to obscure the issues from then on. Now "non-fundamental doctrines" was a category in Lutheran dogmatics used from the early seventeenth century on to

⁹⁷The American Lutheran Church. Minutes, 1940, pp. 14ff, 293ff, 313ff.

describe those Biblical teachings that were not necessary to know in order to be saved.⁹⁸ The fact that these ideas in the Declaration were not "fundamental" was not precisely the reason why the American Lutheran Church committee asked that they be regarded as non-divisive of church fellowship. The teachings in question were certainly "non-fundamental," but the committee minutes do not record this as the reason why toleration of varying points of view be allowed. Rather, it was maintained that since passages involved were subject to various interpretations, all of which were not contrary to the analogy of faith, these interpretations could not be properly the basis of church division. So when the 1940 American Lutheran Church convention concurred with its committee that everything that the Bible teaches is God's word, and therefore binding, it also said:

However, for clarity's sake we add: Not every traditional explanation of a Scriptural statement is binding. The traditional explanation may not be the same intended by the Holy Ghost and therefore may make further study under His guidance necessary; and, since human short-sightedness and sin may preclude the finding or the universal acceptance of the divinely intended sense, we thank God that it is not

⁹⁸The distinction between doctrines considered "fundamental" and "non-fundamental" was first made by Gerhard and Hunnius in the early seventeenth century: Graebner, The Historic Lutheran Position in Non-Fundamentals, pp. 9-15 for a fuller historical discussion. The term "Fundamentals" did not mean the same among Lutherans as among the other Protestants in the 1930's. Cf. Milton Rudnick, Fundamentalism and the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966).

necessary for establishment of church fellowship to agree in every explanation of a Scriptural statement.⁹⁹

But when the 1938 Missouri Synod convention committee used the term "non-fundamental," and the American Lutheran Church convention responded by saying that it was neither necessary nor possible to agree on all non-fundamental doctrines, confusion was bound to result. Furthermore, just at this time, several articles and essays were published which used the terms "non-fundamental" and "open questions" and further complicated the discussion.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹The American Lutheran Church. Minutes, 1940, p. 314, Cf. "The Prospects for Lutheran Union, p. 422.

¹⁰⁰Graebner, The Historical Lutheran Position in Non-Fundamentals (1939); Walther, "The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions," translated by Arndt and Guebert (1939), Cf. Reu, In the Interest of Lutheran Unity (1940), p. 376, in which he said: "This much is true: Since also those statements of the Scriptures which mention the non-fundamental matters, are the Word of God, therefore Christian theologians, having attained to a clear comprehension of the fundamentals, will strive to understand also the other statements of the Bible. They may engage in this task separately, or in cooperation with one another. If they arrive at the same conclusions, they will rejoice. Such agreement will help to strengthen their personal conviction; but they will guard against declaring their conviction to be the only correct and decisive one. They will not forget that the non-fundamental matters are chiefly found in the more or less obscure texts; they will not attempt to force their conclusions upon others, and least of all will they set a definite time limit beyond which those of different opinions may no longer express their convictions nor be tolerated but must be excluded from church fellowship as though they had obstinately hardened themselves against their better knowledge and refused to learn the truth."

Confusion developed through this imprecise use of these various terms in connection with the points for which toleration were asked by the American Lutheran Church. Even though these points were non-fundamental, this was not why the American Lutheran Church committee had made a special case for them. It must be granted that these points were among those classified as open questions in the nineteenth century by the old Iowa Synod. But both committees insisted that this term was no longer used by the American Lutheran Church, and the American Lutheran Church committee had convinced the Missouri Synod committee that their rationale for asking for toleration for these "theological problems" was different from that of the earlier situation.

Yet because of all this unclear labeling of these ideas,¹⁰¹ the opponents of fellowship began to call

¹⁰¹For instance, in the discussion of Lutheran Union in The Lutheran Witness, the article said that the 1938 St. Louis convention allowed toleration for only a specified group of "non-fundamentals." It said these were really "open questions" in a good sense, since they were items where there problems of interpretation. So the convention had resolved to allow this disagreement. The article then quoted the Brief Statement which said, "Those questions in the domain of Christian doctrine may be termed open questions which Scripture answers either not at all or not clearly. . . . Open questions must remain open questions." "Lutheran Union, VI" The Lutheran Witness, p. 275. Whereupon The Confessional Lutheran countered by writing to the secretary of Committee 16 for the 1938 convention to ask whether the term "non-fundamentals" in the Resolution was identical with "open questions." The Secretary, Pastor C. Abel, answered in the negative. Because of this, Burgdorf called the Witness article inaccurate and misleading. He furthermore pointed out that the four

them "open questions" in a pejorative sense without anyone challenging them. The Confessional Lutheran also published a series of articles on Walther's 1968 essay. It implied that the ideas which were called non-divisive of church fellowship were survivors of the old open questions controversy. This called into question the integrity or the intelligence of the Missouri Synod commissioners, since over and over again they had insisted that this old controversy to which Walther had addressed himself had ended years before. The Confessional Lutheran emphasized those parts of that old essay that condemned "open questions" in Walther's day and applied this to the action of the Missouri Synod in 1938. Thus, in the minds of these conservatives, if anyone was unsure about the actions of the 1938 convention, now he could use Walther himself for arguments against it.

eschatological teachings and the idea of the visible church called "open questions" by the Witness had been specifically excluded from this category by the Brief Statement in the sentence following the Witness quotation. P. H. Burgdorf, "Was the term 'Non-fundamental' used as Identical with the Term 'Open Question' in the St. Louis Resolutions of 1938?" The Confessional Lutheran, II (Oct., 1941), 97f. The St. Louis faculty was asked for an opinion, and it complied in December of 1941 by saying that these "four points" were not open questions, but if they involve exegetical difficulties they "are not necessarily and at once divisive of church fellowship." Then it compounded the confusion by giving the need to bear with weaker Christians as the reason for patience and tolerance with the American Lutheran Church, and not the reasons originally used in the Intersynodical Committee meetings. Faculty Opinion, Concordia Historical Institute, Arndt file.

Theodore Graebner

With all this plethora of official and unofficial printed material, and the confusing use of terms and consequent failure to have a calm, objective discussion of the issues, just about the only Missouri Synod figure of any prominence to perceive the real issue was Theodore Graebner. That issue boiled down to what was Biblically necessary for church fellowship.¹⁰² This is not to say that he always articulated it clearly. For instance, he recognized that the terms "non-fundamentals" and "open questions" were not really helpful, and would be best left out of the discussion.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, he too kept on using them, and he never suggested an adequate substitute.

Yet he did see that the heart of the whole issue was whether a church could refuse fellowship to another church because there was a disagreement on something that could not be clearly stated from Scripture. One of

¹⁰²Although the leaders in the American Lutheran Church understood that the 1938 resolutions were a revolutionary step for the Missouri Synod. Dr. Reu is quoted as saying at a pastoral conference, "Through the adoption of the St. Louis Resolutions of 1938 it has become clear that Missouri no longer occupies the position formerly held by it, according to which one can demand complete doctrinal agreement." P. H. B[urgdorf], "Inter-Synodical Conference at Rochelle, Ill.," The Confessional Lutheran, I (Dec., 1940), 78.

¹⁰³Theo. Graebner, The Historic Lutheran Position in Non-Fundamentals, p. 27; "Lutheran Union, VI" p. 276.

his early articles in The American Lutheran clearly pinpointed this issue. He said, in regard to the St. Louis Convention:

After due deliberations, a report was received which asserted that the doctrinal basis for union had been established, a basis satisfactory although there was not agreement in every point of teaching. [*italics in the original*] . . . This acknowledgment [about the non-divisive doctrines] was voted, and thereby the Missouri Synod testified against a separatism which would keep churches apart because of side issues that arise in the discussion of doctrine, problems in interpretation, phraseology, definition of terms, etc., not involving the authority of Scripture. In other words, the Missouri Synod established that it was not ready to be classified as a sect.¹⁰⁴

As long as this basis for fellowship was maintained, there was hope for fellowship. As soon as the Missouri Synod reverted to its previous position that complete and total agreement in doctrine and practice was necessary for church fellowship, it would never happen.

Finally, after decades of warning against unionism, here was a Missouri Synod leader who warned against separatism and sectarianism. He would soon be joined by others.

The issue in 1939 was basically the same as he had stated in 1935 in his The Problem of Lutheran Union: whose standards for church fellowship were correct? The difference was that in 1939 he was beginning to see that Missouri's standards of the past might not have been entirely

¹⁰⁴ Graebner, "Not a Sect--Yet," p. 7.

correct. After much personal soul searching, he wrote in 1946:

A wretched weakness in our Synodical concept of the Scriptural principle is gradually coming to life as we survey the recent discussions of fellowship matters. For one thing, an utterly legalistic, intellectualistic approach had been stipulated as furnishing the only sound basis for the discussion of church union matters. For another thing, absolute agreement in the exegesis of relevant passages is insisted upon. Furthermore, texts have been lifted out of their context and have been made to contain great fundamental principles of church life and discipline which the inspired authors never intended to place into such passages. Romans 16:17 has been set before the church as the great fundamental, proof text against unionism. One interpretation in preference to all others has been designated as the official, Synodical one. All departure from this interpretation has been termed a rejection of the truth of God's Word, open accusation of unionism, a denial of truth taught by our fathers, and sufficient cause why certain editors should be deprived of their offices and certain professors be expelled from their chairs. The fact that by demanding such measures the opponents of Lutheran union are really establishing the papal system in our midst, the official exegesis against which Luther protested at Worms, has escaped these people.¹⁰⁵

Intersynodical Contacts

Part of the reason for the Missouri Synod to have a different approach to relations with other Christians and

¹⁰⁵ Graebner, "Penitent Jubilee," pp. 7f. This statement is reminiscent of the position of Dr. A. Brux in his stand on the passages being used to prove the restrictions on prayer fellowship. It is also similar to one of the positions in the controversy going on at the present time (1973) between Pres. J. A. O. Preus of the Missouri Synod and those who agree with him, and the majority of the Concordia Seminary faculty of St. Louis and those in the synod who agree with them.

other churches was the relative isolation of its clergy. At that time, the synod was very much still culturally and theologically inbred.¹⁰⁶ Even its pastors, whom one might expect to be more exposed to the greater world of ideas than their members, if only because of their greater amount of education, were often very narrow in their perspective. This was due in part to the fact that most of them were from pastor's families, who had left home to begin their pre-ministerial training in the ninth grade after going through the first eight grades in a Lutheran parochial school. Following six years in a synodical pre-ministerial school, they went to the seminary, where several hundred students were taught by only about four to eight full time instructors during the first years of the century. And these instructors had received their training in a similarly closed system. So from their early school years on, these pastors had had little if any contact with any other way of thinking except the indoctrination given them through this system of synodical education.¹⁰⁷ In fact, they were warned against reading anything by men whose theology was suspect. This resulted in their knowing of the way other Christians, even

¹⁰⁶Maurer, "Studies in the Sociology of Religion, VI," pp. 485ff.

¹⁰⁷For a summary of this period in the history of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, see Carl Meyer, Log Cabin to Luther Tower (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), pp. 89-114. Cf. Pannkoke, A Great Church Finds Itself, pp. 33ff; Graebner, "Penitent Jubilee," pp. 3f.

other Lutherans, taught and believed only through the filter of reviews and comments in classrooms and official synodical publications. For years, the feeling among the Missouri Synod members and pastors was that it possessed the truth, therefore, it could learn little from others, and to mingle with them would risk contamination.

The pastors in the American Lutheran Church, however, had had much more experience in meeting with other Lutherans. From the early part of the century, there had been an increasing amount of contact between members, pastors, and congregations of the Ohio and Iowa synods. From 1930 on these two synods plus the Buffalo Synod had merged into one church, and the new body joined the American Lutheran Conference. This all caused much "cross pollination" of Christian thought, as pastors and people from various synods and backgrounds began to work together. In addition to this, the American Lutheran Church was a member of the Lutheran World Convention, the National Lutheran Council and many other minor inter-Lutheran groups for cooperative work.¹⁰⁸

This did not mean that it cooperated with other non-Lutheran Christian groups. Throughout this period when so much was happening in the Ecumenical Movement throughout Christendom, the American Lutherans stayed within their own denominational family. Even the more liberal United

¹⁰⁸ Even in these cases, the American Lutheran Church first made sure that these organizations were of a free conference nature, and did not involve them in what they regarded as unionism. Rev. Lutheran Unity, pp. 25ff.

Lutheran Church had only an advisory connection with the Federal Council of Churches. A study taken at the time (1934) showed that while the Missouri Synod was more rigid than the other Lutheran groups, all Lutherans were significantly more opposed to relations with other denominations than other Christians.¹⁰⁹ For the sin of Unionism was deplored by all Lutheran groups, although with different definitions of what that meant.

Nevertheless, before 1938 the pastors in the American Lutheran Church were much more experienced in inter-synodical contacts than the Missouri Synod men. This meant that there was a cultural lag. When the Inter-synodical pastoral conferences began in 1939, many of the Missouri Synod pastors just had not learned tact, or the ability to listen, or the willingness to look for a common ground for discussion. This is not to say that all the American Lutheran Church pastors possessed these traits, but the Missouri Synod men were much more willing to find fault. These inter-synodical meetings served the purpose, in most cases to show that the men on the other side were not radical heretics, and many were pleasantly surprised that their "opponents" actually

¹⁰⁹ H. Paul Douglass, Church Unity Movements in the United States (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1934), pp. 72ff, 107, 112ff, 176ff, 188ff, 215ff, 269ff, 281ff, 302ff, 351ff, 465ff, 478ff, 490ff, 592ff. These all give findings obtained by research polls which show that not only the Missouri Synod but all Lutherans were hesitant about church relations with non-Lutherans.

believed much as they did. After 1940 this process of understanding would develop rapidly, as the war necessitated cooperative efforts, and as the post-war growth of all the churches, perhaps especially the Missouri Synod, ended the largely midwestern, German makeup of these Lutheran churches.

Yet in the late 1930's, the different approaches to fellowship could be clearly seen in the attitude that the pastors of each body brought to these conferences. The clearest example of the differences between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church in this respect was the first general conference of Lutheran leaders, held in Columbus, Ohio on January 20, 1941. This was the watershed, the point of no return in inter-synodical relations for the Missouri Synod. This meeting brought the Missouri Synod into the mainstream of American Lutheranism.

For the first time the presidents or their personal representatives from all the Lutheran bodies in America, except for the Wisconsin, Norwegian, and Slovak synods, met face to face to discuss a practical problem.¹¹⁰ Presidents Bersell of the Augustana Synod and Behnken of the Missouri Synod, it was noted, were present unofficially. The main topics for discussion were peace, relief and

¹¹⁰ Only President Knubel was absent, and that was because of illness.

reconstruction, ministry to servicemen and "orphaned missions," missions formerly maintained by European Lutheran groups, now cut off from their headquarters. Much was accomplished, even to the point of the Missouri Synod indicating its willingness to coordinate its efforts with the other bodies in the ministry to servicemen and relief for the orphaned missions.

All the other synods took this type of cooperative work as a matter of course. They had all been doing similar things through the National Lutheran Council and other organizations without any problems. However, this did create a problem for the Missouri Synod. It alone saw a distinction between purely physical needs and spiritual needs. Its approach to fellowship led it to condemn any cooperative work where there would be joint sponsorship of anything that would fit into the category of preaching or teaching.

Therefore, President Behnken presented a formal statement which set forth the position of his synod on "cooperation in externals" and fellowship. Consistent with the pre-1938 position of his church, he insisted that without agreement in doctrine and practice there could not be cooperation in any spiritual work. He enumerated doctrines on which he said the churches disagreed: Verbal Inspiration, Conversion, the Church. He said there were others, but these would serve as examples.

Therefore he said that the Missouri Synod would do its share to meet these emergencies, but on its own. In other words, first must come complete agreement, then cooperative work. All the other churches, including the American Lutheran Church, felt that there was enough unity to cooperate on these programs, and that cooperation in them did not constitute unionism.¹¹¹

Behnken's action was greeted with criticism from both the American Lutheran Church and the Wisconsin Synod, for different reasons. Behnken had said that it was a fallacy to think that working together could help achieve unity before there was doctrinal agreement. The Lutheran Standard pointed to its own church's experiences in establishing its own fellowship relations, and said:

Cooperation in a joint emergency task did not force unity, did not dictate the terms of unity, but caused Lutheran leaders and laymen to think more seriously about the importance and value of unity and supplemented and complemented the discussion of doctrinal matters by the Church's theologians.¹¹²

It furthermore listed some things besides doctrinal differences which Behnken emphasized, which it felt stood in the way of Lutheran unity.

¹¹¹"All-Lutheran Conference Deshler-Wallick Motel, Columbus, Ohio, January 20, 1941." Archives of the American Lutheran Church, Poppen file.

¹¹²"Is it a Fallacy?" Lutheran Standard, XCI (March 1, 1941), 11.

Prejudice.

Pride.

Personalities.

A top-heavy approach to the question of fellowship, overemphasizing the theological aspect and striving to secure complete agreement on points where it is neither possible nor desirable that all Christians think alike.

A blindness, at least in part, to the implication of the missionary commission on the matters of fellowship and cooperation.

A failure to appreciate the historic background of the several groups.

The lack of a proper psychology in our negotiations toward fellowship. The Lutheran is, by and large, a much better theologian than psychologist. He strains at a theological gnat and swallows a psychological camel.¹¹³

On the other hand, the Theologische Quartalschrift criticized the Conference itself, because in its words, "The ulterior motive apparently was the desire to exploit the present crisis in the interest of church union."¹¹⁴ The editorial insisted that it was wrong to use the obvious needs of others as a pretext to have unionistic cooperative effort. The letter from the president of the Wisconsin Synod declining his invitation made that synod's position plain. He said:

While we most assuredly consider it the duty of Christian love to do good also to those who are not within our fellowship, we do not find it proper and for the good of the Church to do this as a church and in cooperation with religious bodies with which we are not united in doctrine and practice.¹¹⁵

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴"The Columbus Conference," Theologische Quartalschrift, 38 (April, 1941), 133.

¹¹⁵"President Premier's Letter," Theologische Quartalschrift, 38 (April, 1941), 132.

Being consistent, it also criticized Behnken's presence at the meeting, especially since the reports indicated that the meeting had been opened with prayer, a violation of the prayer fellowship idea. It rejected Behnken's explanation that he was there in an unofficial capacity. Furthermore, it decried the impression given that now the Missouri Synod was cooperating with these "heterodox" bodies.¹¹⁶

The entrance of the Missouri Synod into greater contacts with non-Synodical Conference Lutherans had begun, but its short range results did nothing to dispel the image in the minds of others that the Missouri Synod was a self-righteous prig, insisting on its own way or nothing.¹¹⁷ Despite the fact that its restrictions on cooperation and communication with other Lutherans were relaxing,¹¹⁸ it could not overcome its years of isolation

¹¹⁶ "The Columbus Conference," pp. 134ff.

¹¹⁷ In Dec., 1938, Gerard Bergendoff of the Augustana Synod wrote an article in which he criticized the attitude of the Missouri Synod on fellowship. He said: "I must say that I question the method of attaining fellowship which consists in one party offering a document to the other to be signed on the dotted line." "'Sign Here' Attitude Unattractive." Journal of the American Lutheran Conference, IV (March, 1939), 69, quoting Bergendoff in the Augustana Bulletin of the Augustana Seminary. The phrase "sign on the dotted line" became a slogan for those opposed to Missouri's attitude.

¹¹⁸ Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "Where Leaders Stand on Lutheran Union," American Lutheran, XXIII (Oct., 1940), 7ff. This showed that the majority of leaders in the Missouri Synod indicated in a poll that they felt that pulpit and altar fellowship with the American Lutheran Church within fifteen years was possible,

and its insistence on complete agreement quickly enough to prevent the 1941 Missouri Synod convention from taking a step backwards from its 1938 position.

The Retreat, 1941

In the Spring of 1941, the Report of the Committee on Lutheran Church Union appeared in the Convention Book of Reports and Memorials. It reviewed what had happened during the previous three years, including the results of the meetings with the American Lutheran Church committee, the problems of the Pittsburgh Agreement and the American Lutheran Conference convention, the attitude of the Wisconsin and Norwegian synods, and the obstacles it still saw in the way of church fellowship. It was a very pessimistic report, implying throughout that the two churches were far apart even on agreement about what was necessary for church fellowship.

And if this were not discouraging enough for those in the synod who were in favor of closer contact with other synods, Theodore Graebner co-sponsored a Memorial for the convention with the leaders of The Confessional Lutheran group, Beck, Bramscher, Buenger, Burgdorf, Gullerud, and Schweikert. This resolution called for the discharge of the official committee in favor of free conferences, and it said

probable, or certain. Only eight out of sixty-three thought this was impossible or improbable.

that there must be agreement on all Biblical doctrines, whether they are called fundamental or non-fundamental. In defense of his action, Graebner wrote that he did it to assure a peaceful meeting. Furthermore, he pointed out that the resolution did not call for the convention to rescind the 1938 articles, which he felt was an accomplishment.¹¹⁹

This was symptomatic of the mood of the convention. All could see that movement away from the 1938 position was a certainty. The only question was how drastic would the action be.

The opponents of Lutheran union got more than the proponents. The final resolution noted with regret that the American Lutheran Church "has not taken as firm an attitude in reference to establishing doctrinal unity as under the circumstances we had reason to hope for."¹²⁰ All those favoring closer relations could do was to eliminate explicit mention of the matters of the Pittsburgh Agreement and the American Lutheran Conference, which were

¹¹⁹The Missouri Synod. Proceedings, 1941, p. 202; Burgdorf had originally proposed a stronger resolution. P. H. B[urgdorf], "A Resolution to Rescind the St. Louis Union Articles of 1938," The Confessional Lutheran, II (Feb., 1941), 13f. Letters, E. J. Friedrich to Theo. Graebner, May 6, 1941; D. A. Geiseman to Theo. Graebner, May 21, 1941, Theo. Graebner to D. A. Geiseman, May 24, 1941; Concordia Historical Institute, Graebner file.

¹²⁰The Missouri Synod. Proceedings, 1941, p. 301.

in the original committee resolution. The resolution called for a single document instead of the several adopted in 1938 as the basis for fellowship. All those favoring fellowship could do was to block action to repudiate the 1938 resolutions. The committee resolution called for a new committee to carry on the discussions, to be joined by representatives of the other churches in the Synodical Conference. All those favoring improved relations with the American Lutheran Church could do was to prevent the discontinuation of negotiations, as the conservatives had called for. Everything else in the resolution was a victory for the opponents of fellowship and a retreat from the breakthrough of 1938.¹²¹

¹²¹Ibid., pp. 301ff.

CONCLUSION

What was accomplished out of all this effort on the part of these two church bodies between 1938 and 1941 to achieve closer church relations? On the positive side, the Missouri Synod began to come out of its isolation. It began to question its presuppositions and sacrosanct ideas. Out of the welter of controversy, the issue gradually became clearer. It was not so much the doctrinal differences between the two churches that kept them apart, it was their different attitudes toward the Church and fellowship. On the negative side, the negotiations reached their high point in 1938. All the subsequent events never got past that; indeed, there was a clear retrogression. The conservatives seemed to win at the 1941 Missouri Synod convention, and as a result there was a certain disenchantment with the idea of trying to achieve closer relations with the Missouri Synod on the part of the American Lutheran Church.¹²² So for a time the American Lutheran Church was drawn toward the other Lutheran Churches. But it must be said to the credit of both churches that they did not give up trying to find a way to come closer together, although it would take until 1969 to establish church fellowship.

¹²² M. Reu, "Muessen die Verhandlungen," pp. 577ff.

A pattern emerged from all these attempts at unity. From 1917 to 1929 committees met and were able to work out a mutually acceptable doctrinal statement. Then the more conservative foes of fellowship within the Missouri Synod conducted a campaign to discredit this document, the Intersynodical Theses, as inadequate and full of doctrinal errors. When the Missouri Synod officially rejected these Theses, the other German synods which were in the process of forming the American Lutheran Church reacted by casting their lot with the more liberal Scandinavian bodies by establishing the American Lutheran Conference. This only served to persuade the anti-fellowship forces in the Missouri Synod that they had been right.

Then negotiations began again in 1935 between the two churches. Again, the negotiations resulted in an agreement. Again, the opponents of fellowship voiced their opposition, this time not only because of deficiencies which they saw in the agreement, but also because of the disagreement on what was necessary for fellowship. Again, the American Lutheran Church made it clear that it also wanted closer relations with those other Lutheran bodies more to the theological left, and the Missouri Synod changed its mind on the 1938 agreement, beginning in 1941.

This pattern of agreement, conservative opposition within the Synodical Conference, and then a movement by the American Lutheran Church to these other churches,

would be repeated again in the periods between 1949 and 1956, and between 1962 and the present time. By 1956, the two churches had agreed on The Common Confession, amidst much opposition from the Synodical Conference. When the American Lutheran Church announced its intentions to merge with the Norwegians, the Missouri Synod backed off. It accepted the Common Confession, but declined to implement it with fellowship, stating that now a different situation had arisen with the new merged body. Finally, in 1969, pulpit and altar fellowship was declared between the two churches, the Missouri Synod and the new American Lutheran Church, made up of the former American Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church (the former Norwegian Lutheran Church), and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (a small Danish group). Since that time, there have again been signs of the opposition from conservatives and the evidence of a more liberal spirit in the American Lutheran Church. Whether these things will cause deterioration of the relations between the churches as they have in the past remains to be seen.

What is clear is that in the two cases where significant breakthroughs occurred in inter-church relations, (1938 and 1969) they happened when both bodies recognized that it was neither possible nor necessary completely to agree on every point, interpretation, or application of doctrine and practice. In

1938 the Missouri Synod, although acknowledging that some matters of practice barred the way to church fellowship, did declare that there was sufficient doctrinal agreement for fellowship once these other things were resolved.

This was done in spite of the fact that there was not total agreement on some ideas.

Then again, in 1969, when mutual fellowship was adopted, there was not even a doctrinal statement used as the basis for that fellowship, but only a statement that discussions between the two churches had produced the conviction that enough agreement existed for fellowship. Matters of practice, such as relations with other churches or the problem of lodge membership, were not even mentioned. This kind of basis for fellowship would not have been possible in 1938, but the seeds were already there at that time.

But several things had to happen before the 1938 Resolutions could realistically be carried out, as they were in essence in 1969. For one thing, the Missouri Synod had to break out of its isolation. The events of the wartime and post-war periods stimulated this. It was further achieved as more and more of its theological leaders risked contamination to learn from men of other denominations, through books and graduate training in non-synodical institutions. So gradually changes took place. More and more it became apparent that these Christians

might have something to contribute to a better understanding of the Bible and the work of the church. Thus it became harder to justify an insistence that only the Missouri Synod's understanding and interpretation of a passage or doctrine was correct. This prompted a restudy of all of the traditional approaches to the question of the meaning of the church and the Biblical concept of fellowship. What Adolph Brux began in the early 1930's was to be continued throughout this whole period. The ideas about prayer fellowship and related subjects gained from the traditional interpretation of such passages of Rom. 16:17 and put forth as the accepted position of the synod in 1941 had all been officially discarded by Missouri Synod convention action by 1969.

Secondly, in 1938, both the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod were tied to church federations, the American Lutheran Conference and the Synodical Conference. Neither church wanted to jeopardize their existing fellowship with these groups for a questionable fellowship with one another. So both yielded to pressure from their sister synods and from their own members to continue this fellowship. The breakdown in growing relations in 1941 was partially prompted by the polarization between the Synodical Conference and the American Lutheran Conference, which caught the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church in the middle. A similar situation prevailed in 1956 with the Common Confession. But by 1969, both these federations had ceased to

exist. The Synodical Conference had been dissolved after the Wisconsin Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod withdrew in protest to the "unionism" of the Missouri Synod. The American Lutheran Conference had been disbanded already in 1954 to allow its bodies to pursue their own mergers, the American Lutheran Church in 1960 and the Lutheran Church in America (which included the United Lutheran Church, the Augustana Synod, The Suomi Synod, and the American Evangelical Lutheran Church) in 1962. Thus the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church were free to make decisions unhampered by considerations of other church bodies in fellowship with them.

What conclusions can be drawn from all of this? Here we have two church bodies, both more conservative in doctrine than almost any other Protestant body. There were more things they agreed on than they disagreed on. Yet as long as one of them insisted on complete unanimity in all teachings, and complete uniformity in the way practical matters of church discipline and relations with other churches were carried out, there was no chance of officially having any significant kind of unity. When it was decided by both that this degree of agreement was neither Biblical nor realistic, a partial agreement was reached in 1938. When the Missouri Synod insisted on more complete agreement, a stalemate occurred. When both bodies finally concluded that an agreement in basics was all that

should be required, fellowship became a reality in 1969. If opponents of that fellowship are successful in persuading the Missouri Synod that differences in Bible interpretation is a cause for suspension of that fellowship, the two churches will be back to the situation of 1941.

These two bodies were as close ideologically, theologically and culturally as any two groups could be. If this situation is any indication, no conservative Protestant bodies are going to be able to arrive at complete agreement in doctrine and practice. In all honesty, there is no such thing even within a single congregation. There certainly was no such unanimity between the members of the Synodical Conference in 1938. In this age of ecumenism, most church bodies have established fellowship relations with others with little or no doctrinal agreement. But there are still some to whom an emphasis on correct statements of doctrine is important. In these cases, it would appear that a church would have to decide whether it wants to insist on its own position and forego fellowship or whether it sincerely wants to find a way for closer church relations. If this is the case, it will have to compromise its position and agree to a doctrinal statement that it regards as untrue, which probably would be distasteful to it, or it will allow fellowship on the basis of agreement on most things, while allowing disagreement in others. What would be included in such a category may vary

from communion to communion, but the basic rule is sound. Official church fellowship cannot be achieved as long as the principle on which this is based is complete agreement in doctrine and practice.

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To facilitate further research on this and related subjects, the various types of materials used for this dissertation are here noted.

A. Primary materials:

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2. Minutes of committee meetings. Besides the minutes of occasional or relatively unimportant committees which are to be found in various collections of papers mentioned above, the complete set of minutes of the Intersynodical Committee (i.e. the joint meetings of the committees of the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod between 1936 and 1941) are located in the Arndt file in the Concordia Historical Institute and in the Fellowship with Missouri Synod file in the Archives of the American Lutheran Church.
3. Proceedings of conventions. The convention materials of each church body are found in their own archives or seminary libraries. However, for convenience, it should be noted that collections of Proceedings from the Missouri Synod, the Wisconsin Synod, the Norwegian Synod and the Synodical Conference are located at the Concordia Historical Institute. The Proceedings from the American Lutheran Church and the Norwegian Lutheran Church (the Evangelical Lutheran Church after 1946) are located at the Archives of the American Lutheran Church. The Minutes of the conventions of the American Lutheran Conference

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